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BIBLE STUDIES

FROM THE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

COVERING THE

INTERNATIONAL

SUNDAY-SCHOOL LESSONS FOR 1893

BY

GEO. F. PENTECOST, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "IN THE VOLUME OF THE BOOK,"
"OUT OF EGYPT," ETC.



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I.

RETURNING FROM THE CAPTIVITY.—Ezra i, 1-11.

(1) Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, (2) Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. (3) Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. (4) And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem. (5) Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem. (6) And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered. (7) Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; (8) Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. (9) And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives, (10) Thirty basins of gold, silver basins of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. (11) All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.—Ezra i, 1-11.

In the Second Book of Kings (chapter xxv, 1-12) we have an account of the destruction of Jerusalem, the burning of Solomon's Temple, and the captivity and deportation of Judah and Benjamin from the land of their fathers by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. (See "Bible Studies" for 1891, pp. 191.) The prophets of the Lord who had foretold this captivity had also predicted their return to their own land after seventy years. "And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity." "For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in

causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." "For thus saith the Lord, Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them." (Jer. xxv, 12; xxix, 10, 11; xxxii, 42.) Long before Jeremiah prophesied the captivity and return, Isaiah had (150 years before) declared that this return should be brought about by Cyrus, thus unfolding the future so minutely as to reveal the rise of this great man, and even foretell his name. (Is. xlv, 28; xlv, 1.) The seventy years were now accomplished. Cyrus had ascended the throne of Babylon, and in his first year decreed the return of the exiles. The Book of Ezra begins the historical account of that momentous event. This brief history is chronological, and though with many a gap in it, covers a period of about eighty years. At present we have only to do with the first eighteen or twenty years of the whole period, including the time between the issuing of the decree of Cyrus, until the finishing and dedication of the new Temple at Jerusalem. Ezra does not give in detail the events connected with the return except so far as they immediately affected the great work of rebuilding. He does not describe the spiritual side of the return, but only the material details in connection with the carrying out of the commands of Cyrus, and the difficulties and hindrances incident thereto. The spiritual state of the people is described by the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, who were contemporary with Ezra and the resettlement, the first two being present with the people from the beginning, while the last arose later on. The spiritual history of the people during this resettlement of their land is detailed at length in most of the Psalms included between the hundred and seventh and the hundred and forty-sixth, the exceptions being some which have been inserted in the various cycles and applied to the incidents of that time, and which bear the name of David in the inscription. A study of these Psalms, together with the prophets named, will throw a great flood of light upon this whole period.

Of Ezra, the writer of this history, we know a good deal, and tradition has furnished us with many stories, while modern speculative criticism has ascribed to him much more than the facts of the case would seem to warrant. He was the lineal descendant of Phineas, the son of Aaron. (Ezra vii, 1-5.) He is said to have been the high-priest of the Jews during the latter part of their captivity, for he was born during the exile, and could not have been much more than forty years of age when he led the return of the people to their

land. He was a great scholar, "a scribe," "a ready scribe of the law of Moses," "a scribe of the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of the statutes of Israel," "a scribe of the law of the God of heaven," and a "priest." (Neh. vii; xii, 26.) Josephus tells us that he was particularly conversant with the laws of Moses, and that he was held in universal esteem on account of his righteousness and mercy; that he was a man of meek and gentle disposition, while at the same time full of character and energy. He is said to have been the author of the present Old Testament canon, and even to have transcribed the entire law of Moses, together with the earlier histories, from memory (all written copies having perished). Indeed, if we should believe all that has been ascribed to him, we must conclude that he was the author of all the prophets, great and small. It is considered more than likely, however, that he was the writer of the 119th Psalm. He lived, according to the best information, to the great age of 120 years, and died in the same year as Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, with whom the prophetic canon closed, for after them no prophet arose in Israel until John the Baptist. The book that bears his name, and with which we are at present concerned, is divided into two parts, chapters first to sixth (inclusive) being a history of the returning exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple, and covering a period extending from the reign of Cyrus to that of Darius. The second part (consisting of four chapters) contains an autobiographical history of himself and a personal account of the returning exiles.

I.—THE PROCLAMATION OF CYRUS.

Cyrus is one of the most remarkable and conspicuous historical characters of the later ancients. He was undoubtedly the greatest hero of the East. The son of Cambyses, prince of Persia, he was doomed to death by his reputed grandfather (then king of Media), but escaped and afterward appeared among the soldiery of Persia, and rapidly rose by his genius and prowess to the command of the armies of that dependency; after a while he assumed entire military control, and carried on independently his military schemes until he had overthrown the grandfather who had at first doomed him to death, and finally founded the vast empire of Persia, over which he ruled with signal power and justice. He had been for many years king of Persia before he conquered Babylon. It was in the first year of this latter conquest, after he had ascended the throne of that kingdom, that he issued his decree concerning the Jews. "Per-

haps no conqueror has ever left behind him so fair a fame as that of Cyrus the Great. His mighty achievements have been borne down to us on the voice of the nations which he elevated; his evil deeds (if any) have had no historian to record them." Moreover, he enjoyed the singular privilege of being the first of the Gentile kings to befriend the exiled Jews at the time of their sorest need. His instrumentality in restoring this ancient and favored people to their land has done more for the world than all the conquests of the greatest men, for from them has streamed forth that light and life which has been the illumination and inspiration of all that has been and is best in the history of modern nations.

1. His name.—Secular history tells us that he assumed the name of Cyrus, or Coresh (a Persian name signifying the sun), after he ascended the throne of Babylon, dropping his old name "Agradates." There is nothing remarkable in this change of name, as it was a custom of frequent occurrence. The remarkable thing about it is that the name Cyrus was given to him by prophecy two hundred years before he was born, at the same time describing his character, his military achievements, and what he would do for the people of God, who were not as yet exiled from their own land. (Is. xlv, 28; xlv, 1.) There is no reason to believe that Cyrus knew anything of this prophecy until after he had assumed his new name. On the other hand, there is every reason to believe that he was moved to his benevolent action toward the exiled Jews in his new kingdom by having his attention called to these prophecies, both those of Isaiah, in which he is spoken of by name and designated as God's "shepherd," and also those of Jeremiah, in which the return of the exiles just at this juncture is explicitly foretold.

2. The prologue of the proclamation.—This famous proclamation of Cyrus is introduced by two general and most important statements. (i) An acknowledgment of the true God—"The Lord God of heaven." It has usually been supposed that Cyrus (being a Persian) was a monotheist, and not an idolater and polytheist, and that so he more readily came to acknowledge the God of heaven—the Jehovah of Israel and the God of Daniel (ii, 21)—as being none other than the "Ormazd," the "Supreme God," whom they recognized as having the direction of all worldly affairs. Later discoveries, however, have settled it that Cyrus was *not* by birth and training a Persian, but an Elamite and a polytheist. The question naturally arises how Cyrus came to introduce such a clause in the very opening of his proclamation. It would be more natural for him to have introduced the name of one or both of his gods. The explana-

tion is (and must be) that Daniel, whom he had made prime-minister (retaining him in that office when he had taken Babylon), had instructed him in the prophecies concerning himself, and had pointed out to him that he owed it to God not only to carry out this decree of Heaven, but also to ascribe to God his marvelous successes in triumphing over all the nations which he had subdued. The reading of these ancient Scriptures of the Jews in which he found himself mentioned by name and his successes so accurately described must have powerfully impressed that great monarch, also the added statements that God had raised him up for the express purpose of restoring his people and fulfilling his purpose concerning them. It could not have been otherwise. (ii) The acknowledgment concerning his present greatness and power—"He hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth." The forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah sets forth how God had overruled all things to bring the great kingdoms of the East under the power of this monarch. How far Cyrus was converted to God we are not prepared to venture an opinion, but it is evident that, having decided to restore the Jews to their own land, he was prepared to accept Daniel's view of the matter as pointed out from the prophets of Israel, and so he wrote accordingly (if, indeed, we may not suppose that the whole proclamation was drawn up by Daniel and accepted and subscribed by the king, which we think not unlikely). As a matter of fact, Cyrus was not the ruler over all the kingdoms of the earth; but it is entirely consistent with the use of Oriental language for him to express himself in this way, being, in fact, the most powerful ruler in the then known world, and actually exercising sovereignty over all the earth between India and the Mediterranean, including all Asia Minor. He was even then meditating the conquests both of India and Egypt, already counting himself as good as their ruler. It is not unlikely that the strategic importance of having a powerful and grateful people inhabiting his southwest frontier (as would be the case were the Jews restored and well established in their own land) powerfully co-operated in his mind with the instructions and advices of Daniel to carry out God's word of prophecy. God works his will concerning men by means of and in connection with their free will, and uses even the worldly motives of his instruments.

3. His submission to God's command.—"He (the God of heaven) hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah." In this clause of the proclamation there is distinct reference to the prophetic word of Isaiah uttered two hundred years before the birth of Cyrus. "That saith of Cyrus, He is my shep-

herd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the Temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." (Is. xliv, 28.) To this command of the God of heaven Cyrus, the proud conqueror of the world, now humbly bows. As we have frequently remarked, could we know all the counsel of God, and were the history of all kings written from the point of view of God's plans concerning the people whom he loves, it would be seen that they also, in carrying forward their own schemes, were even (all unknown to themselves) executing God's purposes. In the case of Cyrus we know that divine power was directly exercised upon him, for we read (v. 1) that "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." Whether Cyrus would have carried out this purpose without the added impulse received directly from God may be doubted, even under the guidance of Daniel and the powerful arguments brought to bear upon him from the reading of the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah; but God holds the hearts of kings in his hand and turns them whither he will. (Prov. xxi, 1.)

4. The command of Cyrus.—This takes first the form of permission. "Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem and build the house of the Lord God of Israel." This was the distinct official announcement that their political captivity and exile was over. They had now full permission to leave Babylon, to return to their own land and rebuild the Temple, which was the center of their worship. It is noted that in this proclamation Cyrus is led to not only acknowledge the God of Israel as "a" God, or even "the" God, of Israel, but he adds, "He is *the God*"—that is, he confesses the absolute supremacy of the God of Israel. Having laid his hand to this work, he does it thoroughly. This decree is not one of expulsion, but of permission. He did not drive the people out of Babylon, but just gave them full permission to go if they so desired. The next clause in the proclamation covers the case of those who, though at full liberty to go with their brethren, still chose to remain in the land where they had been born or settled. It must be remembered that a vast majority of the Jews in Babylon at this time were born in the land during the long exile, covering a period of seventy years. Most of the original exiles were dead, and except for their religious traditions the people were natives of the land. Many of them had made homes for themselves, not a few of them had married in the land, as we elsewhere learn (ix, 2), and their natural attachment to the homes of their exile (probably being also largely influenced by their heathen wives) was stronger than their religious sentiment and the old patriotism of

their fathers. These were not compelled by Cyrus to go with their brethren; but they were commanded (if they elected to remain in Babylon) to help the returning exiles with large and liberal gifts of silver and gold, goods and cattle, all for the purpose of rebuilding the Temple and re-establishing the Jewish rituals. They represent that large number of Christians of our day who themselves will not leave their purely worldly pursuits to engage directly in the Lord's work, but commute such service by large contributions of their wealth. A poor substitute, but a service that is still commanded, and accepted for what it is worth. This circumstance would also prove that the general condition of the exiled Jews was not altogether bad in Babylon. It was nothing like the "bitter bondage" of their forefathers in Egypt under the later Pharaoh's reign.

II.—THE RETURNING EXILES.

Among all the two hundred thousand who had gone down into exile there were not a few of the younger people who had lived through it all, and had never ceased to mourn over their banishment from their own land, and on whose hearts the altar fires of hope and longing desire had never ceased to burn. No doubt there were those of a younger generation who were also filled with that unspeakable joy which the psalmist describes when he says: "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad." (Ps. exxvi, 1-3.)

1. **The glad ones.**—Among those who at once sprung to the privilege which had been granted them were naturally the "chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin" (for of the other tribes there were few if any remaining in Babylon, having been scattered among many nations and practically lost). With these chiefs were many of the priests and Levites, though elsewhere we learn that there were more priests than Levites. These were they who had been waiting and longing to return. They were like hounds in a leash straining to be let go, and as soon as they were set free sprung away to their own dear land. They were like those who are "waiting for the coming of the Lord," and are ready to respond at once to the cry, "A bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him"—those who are "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the Lord." (II. Pet. iii, 12.)

2. **The "stirred-up" ones.**—Besides these whose hearts had

been longing for the return there were those whose hearts were stirred up by the Lord at the time of this proclamation, and who responded at once under inward pressure, and joined with those fathers and brethren who were already waiting and watching. While they were not so sorrowful as the others, yet they were full enough of religious desire and patriotism to forsake their homes and go forth to their real home in Jerusalem, the land of their fathers. They represent a large class of Christians who, though not "instant in season and out of season," are yet so far spiritual that they respond to the first breath of revival that comes to the Church of God. Those more or less entangled in the world may still be more spiritual than they are worldly, and may shake off their sloth and make quick choice of the things of God.

3. The helpers.—It is added that "they that were about them strengthened their hands." (v. 6.) These were those of whom we have already spoken, whose worldly or domestic attachments were too great for them to sever for the sake of returning to Jerusalem and engaging in the God-given task of rebuilding the Temple. Perhaps, also, there were proper Babylonians who were more or less moved by attachment and respect for their Jewish neighbors, or had caught the present enthusiasm, and were willing to bid them "God speed" in their return—persons who were willing to give, not "themselves," but their goods, to the good work of God. Many motives may have entered into their action, and we find the same class among us to-day, the so-called "well-wishers" of the cause of Christ—benevolent husbands of Christian wives, kind-hearted parents of Christian children; decent people of the world, who, though not willing to go over to God's side, yet hope to make some way for themselves by gifts of gold and silver. The motive is neither high nor noble, nevertheless the action may betoken the presence of some striving of the Spirit with them. God wants hearts rather than goods; yet it may be that many will follow their gifts by and by, with a surrender of themselves to the Lord, as many of these who remained behind did at a later period under the influence of Ezra's ministrations. On this principle we would not directly solicit aid for God's cause from unbelievers, yet if they are moved or stirred up voluntarily to offer gifts to help on Christian work, we would not refuse, provided these gifts were not offered with the motive that prompted Simon Magus to offer money to Peter. (Acts viii, 18-23.)

III.—THE RESTORATION OF THE SACRED VESSELS.

At the time the people were carried away into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar the Temple had been first rifled of all the vessels and

then burnt. There were many thousands of these treasures, valuable both on account of the precious metals which composed them and for the greater reason that they had been dedicated to the service of God. Some of them Belshazzar had impiously used in that great drunken feast which he gave to a thousand of his lords on that night, years before, when the city had fallen into the hands of his enemies and he himself was slain. (II. Kings xxiv, 13; Dan. v, 1-4.)

1. The transfer of these sacred vessels.—It seems that these vessels to the great number of five thousand four hundred, including both gold and silver (v. 11), had been kept all these years in the royal treasure-house of Babylon. They are now by the decree of Cyrus restored to their proper ownership. He therefore required his treasurer Mithredath to deliver them over to Sheshbazzar, the Prince of Judah, by him to be taken to Jerusalem and finally restored to the new Temple which he had commanded to be built unto the Lord. Thus was the restoration completed, so far as the authority of Cyrus was concerned. He had made complete restitution of all that had been taken away into captivity from the Lord. When a man is converted to God he is supposed to give not only himself to God (to whom he rightfully belongs) but also all his possessions. Had Cyrus refused to give up these precious and sacred vessels when he set the people free and bade them build the Temple, his sincerity might have been well impeached. When Moses left Egypt he insisted that the "flocks and herds" should go out with them. If a man professes conversion and yet does not bring his wealth in consecration to God, there is always reason to doubt the genuineness of the conversion. I have heard of an old Baptist minister who used always to insist that his converts should put their purses in their pockets when they were baptized, as a proof that they were sincere. I have also heard of an ancient Irish chief who was converted to God, but whom when he was baptized refused to have his right arm immersed, because he wished to reserve it to carry on his warfare with his enemies. Paul speaks of these vessels of gold and silver in that passage in which he likens them to the servants of God who are used by the Master in his "living Temple," which is the Church. (II. Tim. ii, 20, 21.)

2. The Prince of Judah.—This Sheshbazzar into whose hands the vessels were delivered is the same as Zerubbabel. (ii, 2; v, 14.) He was appointed by Cyrus the political governor of the movement, as Ezra was made the priest and scribe of the people. Chapter v, 14, gives a more detailed account of this transfer of the vessels in connection with the decree of Cyrus.

II.

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE.—Ezra iii, 1-13.

(1) And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. (2) Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. (3) And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord, even burnt offerings morning and evening. (4) They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; (5) And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the Lord. (6) From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. (7) They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia. (8) Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the Lord. (9) Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites. (10) And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. (11) And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. (12) But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: (13) So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.—Ezra iii, 1-13.

The second chapter of Ezra is given up largely to the enumeration of the returning exiles, and to the particulars of their families,

according to their houses. The leaders of this movement were anxious that the unmixed Israelites should be separated from those whose blood or families had been corrupted by intermarriage with the heathen among whom they had been sojourning. There were some mixed families among them; these they did not *forbid*, only (if they could not show a pure descent) they were excluded from the priesthood as being "polluted." (ii, 62, 63.) In this we see a very proper care, the principle of which, had it been observed throughout the history of the Christian Church, would have saved a world of trouble and a mass of corruption. The rulers of all churches should be ever ready to welcome into the worshiping congregation all who may come, but into the membership of the Church—the priesthood of believers—only those who are able to declare their spiritual descent from God by the Holy Spirit, through faith in Christ. Most of Israel's troubles came through unholy mixtures and alliances with the heathen people around them; just as most of our troubles in Christian ages have come from the mixture of the "tares among the wheat." No man or woman should be admitted into the communion of Christ's Church until reasonable care is taken to ascertain whether or not they have been the subjects of the renewing grace of God.

The register having been completed, it was found that the number of pilgrims returned to the land of their fathers was forty-two thousand three hundred and seventy, besides seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven servants and maids who went up with them; in addition to these there were two hundred singing men and women—in all, forty-nine thousand nine hundred and seven souls. Beside this great army of men and women (it is not certain whether children under age were counted), there were horses, camels, asses, and mules to the number of eight thousand one hundred and thirty-six. These latter were used probably for the old men and some of the feeble women to ride upon, and for purposes of transport. It was an immense cavalcade, and must have made a great impression upon the people of the land as they marched out of exile and through the intervening countries. "Who are these and whence came they, and whither and wherefore do they go?" must have been questions on many tongues. The story of Israel's sin, her captivity, and now of her return, together with the prophecies and the action of Cyrus as set forth in his proclamation, were told over and over again, and did not a little to sow some seeds of God's truth among the heathen. The Church of God, as she moves through this world with loins girded, lamps trimmed and burning, goods consecrated and taken with the people over to God's ground, ought to be the occasion of

exciting a similar interest among the world's people. But large as this company was, it represented but a fraction of the whole number of exiles. More than two hundred thousand had been carried away captive by Nebuchadnezzar. And now, after this first exodus, there were yet large colonies to follow them and be led into their own land by the exertions of Ezra and Nehemiah. It suggests what is ever to be seen among the people of God. There are those who are always on the watch for the word of God's command, ready to forsake all and follow whither he leads them. On the other hand, there are those whose self-interest will not suffer them to depart promptly; who are reluctant to make sacrifices, to sunder pleasant worldly ties and, to go forth outside the camp, bearing reproach and suffering hardship for Christ. When our Lord comes again, there will be comparatively few who will be "looking for and hasting unto his coming" and ready to meet him in the air; but he will fetch the rest later, for though so many of us are lukewarm and slack in *our* love and duty *he* is ever true to his promises and to his grace, and will not suffer one of his own to be lost or left out of the glory he has prepared for them.

This return of the Jewish exiles took place in the first year of the reign of Cyrus as king of Babylonia, and in the year B.C. 536. It probably began early in the spring, and the journey must have occupied several months, two or three at the very least. We know that the land had lain waste and desolate during all those long seventy years. No other colonists had been placed there, and no people had voluntarily taken up the abandoned and deserted land. The old cities were in ruins, the old homes fallen into decay, the once fertile and fruitful fields given up to fallow weeds and wild growth. Wild beasts were the only inhabitants, except perhaps an occasional stray settler. The first care of the people upon entering the land was to settle their families and make a beginning of new homes. Naturally they gathered in the old villages and small cities lying adjacent to Jerusalem. "The children of Israel were in the cities." Houses had to be built or old ones repaired, and fields and vineyards had to be cleared and planted. This occupied them for several months, as we may well imagine. Who can enter into their feelings during these months? The old men and women remembered the time before the exile, when Jerusalem was in her glory, when the Temple stood up like a mountain of gold in the sunlight, when the fields were fruitful and the people all well-to-do. Then they had forgotten their God and had turned to idols, and given themselves up to the lusts of the flesh. Then came their dreadful punish-

ment; and now the mercy of God was returning upon them. What stories the older ones must have told the younger; what new reading of the Word; what high resolves; what new purposes! One thing was certain, that among all the furniture and effects which the exiles brought out of Babylon, there was not one idol. The exile had forever cured them of idolatry, at least in form, for from the day of the return until their dispersion after the rejection of Christ we hear of no false gods in Israel.

I.—BUILDING THE ALTAR.

After having allowed a reasonable time for the people to get settled in the land, the leaders of the movement and Joshua the high-priest (Haggai i, 1; Zech. iii, 1) summoned the people from the cities to Jerusalem. It was in September of our year, the seventh month of the Jewish year. How bitter and sorrowful must have been their emotions as the people assembled within the broken-down walls of their once glorious city, now a vast heap of rubbish. The splendid Temple of Solomon that had been the pride and glory of the nation for centuries was "rased to the very foundations." All was ruin and desolation; but God had brought them back again, a new beginning of national and spiritual life was before them, and "God was with them."

1. "**As one man.**"—So the graphic historian expresses that first assembly in Jerusalem after the return. "The people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem." There is a most important principle in this action. When our Lord ascended to heaven and left his disciples to begin the work of rearing a temple of "living stones for an habitation of God through the Spirit," we are told that "they were with one accord in one place" (Acts ii, 1), and that place in the very city and not far from the very Temple which these exiles were now gathered to rebuild. Again we are told that those first disciples "were of one mind and one heart." When God's people are agreed together as touching the thing they shall ask, and will do, and work together "as one man," then it is that they are found irresistible by all the powers of the world. Especially is this so when they are gathered about the altar and the temple of God, which altar and temple Jesus Christ is to us.

2. **Building the altar.**—It is true that Cyrus in his commission authorized them to build the house of God, but the great and pious leaders began their work wisely by first building again the old ruined brazen altar for the burnt-sacrifices. Worship of God must always

go before work for God, or, we may say, reconciliation precedes service. The religions of the world put work before worship, whereas the true order is first worship then work, first life and then service. We do not work to live, but live to work. "The altar before the Temple." The burnt-offerings consisted first of the "whole burnt-offering" (Lev. i, 4-9), which sets forth "surrender to God"; the "meat-offering," a part of which was consumed, sets forth "a pure and holy walk" with God (Lev. ii, 1-9); the "peace-offering" (the fat of which was consumed) sets forth "peace, reconciliation, and fellowship" (Lev. iii, 5) between God and the people; the "sin-offering," the fat of which also was consumed, sets forth our justification; "the trespass-offering," the fat of which was consumed also, sets forth the forgiveness of recurring sins accompanied with confession and restitution. (Lev. iv, 12.) For a full account of these offerings, all of which were burnt wholly or in part, the first nine chapters of Leviticus should be carefully studied—indeed, the whole of that priestly book, which shows us the way to God, or how a sinful man may come into God's presence and live. There was, however, a daily offering of "two lambs of the first year without spot, day by day, for a continual burnt-offering," the one to be offered in the morning and the other in the evening. (Num. xxviii, 3, 4, 6.) In these daily offerings there is a remembrance of all the other offerings, and they set forth in particular the great and complete offering which Jesus made of himself to God on the cross "by the Holy Spirit." (John i, 29; I. Pet. i, 19, 20; Rev. xiii, 8.) This altar "they set upon his bases." I suppose we are to understand by this that they searched about among the ruins until they found the old foundations of the "altar of burnt-offering" as it had stood in the days before the destruction of the Temple. This also was wisely and well done. All reformations ought to begin just where the old duties were left off; a restoration of the old ways. No new foundations are needed in God's work or worship, and the returning backslider must take up his cross and service just where he left or abandoned them. Thus did these wise men who were superintending the restoration of the Temple. They sought no new site and laid no new foundations. "Fear was upon them because of the people of those countries." Surrounding them were many enemies. I suppose they had already had sharp intimations that they would not be allowed to restore the Temple and worship God without opposition. There is never a lack of enemies when the people of God begin to show activity either in the way of religious reformation or aggressive spiritual work. The later story of the recolonization of

the land by the Jews returned from exile tells how effectually these enemies worked, and how heroically at last the devoted Jews (under Nehemiah especially) pushed forward the work of restoring both Temple and city. David sang a note of praise to God for preparing a table for him in presence of his enemies (Ps. xxiii, 5), and God's people in all ages have had joyful occasion to sing that song under many very different circumstances. In this world we must expect tribulations, fightings from without and fears from within, but the end is sure to be victory and peace. Let us never hesitate to go forward with God's work because of the presence of enemies; and let us be sure to gather as one man about a restored or rebuilt altar, if we hope for success in our undertakings.

3. The feast of tabernacles.—This ancient festival was restored by these exiles. One of the best things which Ezra accomplished for the people of God was the restoration to them of the law of God (which had been lost) and the revival of the reading and study of it. We are told that this excellent man "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." (vii, 10.) Among the things discovered by his searching of the law was the long-neglected feast of tabernacles, which had not been observed for many centuries, even since the days of Joshua. (Neh. viii, 14-17.) This feast was instituted by Moses at the command of God, to remind them that they were pilgrims and strangers in the earth (Lev. xxiii, 34-36), even when they had built for themselves houses and permanent abodes. Therefore at the recurrence of the feast of harvest the people were commanded to "gather them boughs and build them booths on the house-tops, in the streets, and about the courts of the Temple" (Neh. viii, 15-17), and in them to dwell for seven days, rejoicing that God was their true habitation and not houses built with hands, and that he was to be ever their portion, rather than the things of this world. It is a lesson of which we ought ever to be reminding ourselves.

4. All the feasts restored.—In connection with this new settlement of Judea and the rebuilding of the altar of the Lord, the entire round of Levitical sacrifices was restored, and perhaps more completely observed than ever since the people first came out of Egypt. There is an expression in the fourth verse which is most suggestive: "As the duty of each day required." There are indeed set times and seasons for special service in connection with the true life of every child of God; but there is no day that does not bring with it its duty. He is the best Christian who serves God every day "as the duty of each day requires." We are suffering a great curse

from the multitude of "Sunday Christians," who seem to commute all service of God during the whole week by a formal act of worship on the first day. It has been well said that the world watches the professor of religion on Monday to see what he means by going to church on Sunday. If we are found doing daily "the duties which each day requires," the world will not doubt the sincerity of our Sabbath worship, and will be constrained to believe that the life of the Christian is a real one. To be a saint at Church and a devil or a worldling in our homes or places of business is only to blaspheme the name of God and to cause the world to mock.

II.—LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE TEMPLE.

Hitherto the people had been busy settling themselves in the land. Their first formal act in connection with the restoration had been accomplished in rebuilding the altar of the Lord and re-establishing the round of sacred feasts and services. For seven days they had lived in booths, but as yet the "foundation of the Temple of the Lord was not laid." The time had now come to begin that great work.

1. The employment of masons and carpenters.—The first thing to be done was to gather together material for this work. Money had been already freely contributed by the returning exiles and by many of their friends and brethren who had remained behind in Babylon. (i, 6; ii, 69.) With this workmen were employed. The stone necessary was quarried from the great rocky beds near by; the timbers which had been burned at the destruction of the Temple had to be replaced from the forests of Lebanon, and thence brought by sea from Joppa, just as it was done in the time of the building of the first Temple by Solomon. (I. Kings v, 6-11.) For this purpose workmen were employed from Tyre and Zidon, and they were paid out of the grant which Cyrus had made from the government treasury. (Ezra iii, 7; vi, 8.) This preparatory work was long and tedious, for it required nearly two years to clear away the ruins and prepare the material for laying the foundations. But no time is wasted in laying well and strongly the foundations for God's temple. Good after-building often comes to grief because foundation work is poorly done. "Make haste slowly" is a good proverb, even though not an inspired one.

2. The work set forward.—After two years spent in gathering and preparing the material, Zerubbabel and Jeshua gathered their brethren and the Levites from twenty years old and upward, and

appointed them overseers of the work, and they in their turn marshaled the various workmen, skilled mechanics and laborers, masons, carpenters, and common workmen, and the work was begun with energy. How glad a day it must have been when the people saw the constructive work actually begun! There are in all this wise lessons of orderly arrangement, and provision for wise direction and supervision. "To every man his work." (Mark xiii, 34.) All honor to the Levites and master-workmen, but all honor also to those who were appointed to do the humbler but no less necessary labor. It is beautiful to see brethren "dwelling together in unity," but even more inspiring to see them "working together with God" (II. Cor. vi, 1) harmoniously and enthusiastically, each one glad and happy to do that which his hands find to do with all his might, the lowly workman not envious of the higher estate of the brother over him, and the brother in the high place not despising but honoring the "man of low estate," each counting it an honor to be permitted to do anything for God.

3. The foundation laid.—Here we have the origin of our modern ceremonies in connection with the laying of the foundation-stones of new buildings, especially those dedicated to God. The priests were clad in their holy vestments; the Levites arranged with the singers to conduct the service of praise—the sons of Asaph with their cymbals, arranged after the ordinance of David. (I. Chron. vi, 31; xvi, 4; xxv, 1; Neh. xii, 24.) They sang together by course, "praising and giving thanks unto the Lord: because he is good, and his mercy endureth forever." The whole Psalms, which they sang thus by part and in course, were most likely the 106th, 107th, 136th, 137th, and perhaps others. In these Psalms at least we get a glimpse of the spiritual attitude of the people toward God while they were engaged in rebuilding his Temple. God's work is happy and joyful work, and when the heart is glad with gratitude and the lips vocal with praise, then the labor of our hands is light. A thankless heart is a heavy one, and work done without gladness is drudgery. In response to the singers, and when the foundation was formally declared to be laid, the assembled multitude shouted with a great shout of gladness because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

4. Tears mingled with song, and weeping with the noise of shouting.—A smile and a tear lie often close beside each other on the faces of men. It was so here. Among the multitude of those present were old men who had seen the first Temple and all the glory of the "holy city" when Solomon's house of cedar and ivory was still standing. They were glad for the new building, but they

could not help contrasting its proposed proportions with the magnificence of the old one. Perhaps their hearts were bowed with sorrow at the remembrance of the sins of their fathers (and possibly their own) which had brought such ruin and desolation upon the nation and the house which they were now permitted to assist in repairing. I have seen a mother smiling and weeping at the birth of a babe—smiling with joy that to her another child was given, weeping at the remembrance of one erstwhile taken from her. This new Temple was indeed a beautiful building, but it could never be to them what the old one had been. In this Temple was no Ark of the Covenant; no radiant Shekinah; no more the answers by Urim and Thummim; and with the building of this Temple the prophetic fire of the nation went out, for after Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi no other prophet arose in Israel until John the Baptist. Yet a greater glory was in reserve for this minor Temple, even the actual appearance in it of the Incarnate Son of God. Perhaps this is what is meant by the prediction that “the glory of the *latter* house shall be greater than that of the former.” (Hag. ii, 9.) We may fairly infer, however, that the joy was in excess of the sorrow. Needless weeping over past glories is not meet, for weeping will not bring them back to us; but we may well shout as we turn our faces toward the future to begin afresh the work of God, trusting to his promises of grace.

III.

ENCOURAGING THE PEOPLE.—Haggai ii, 1-9.

(1) In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the Lord by the prophet Haggai, saying, (2) Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, (3) Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? (4) Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts: (5) According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. (6) For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; (7) And I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. (8) The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. (9) The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.—Haggai ii, 1-9.

The historical setting of this prophecy is found in the fourth chapter of the Book of Ezra. The return of the Jews to their own land, the relaying of the foundation of the house of the Lord, and their evident purpose of restoring their nationality around the rebuilt Temple, had excited the jealousy and enmity of their heathen neighbors, and especially of the Samaritans, who, as soon as they discovered the intention of Zerubbabel and Joshua, made overtures to them to be allowed to join with them in the work. To this proposition Zerubbabel returned a prompt negative, saying, "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto the Lord our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel; as Cyrus king of Persia hath commanded us." (Ezra iv, 3.) This answer and the reason assigned, that the Samaritans were not of the stock of Israel (which they affected to be), enraged them against the Jews, and moved them to stir up the officials in the province against them. There is nothing to show that Cyrus ever in the least altered his purpose toward the Jews; but in his many absences from Babylon, attending to the affairs of his kingdom and carrying on various wars, these intriguers were enabled to worry and perplex the Jews very much. During the lifetime of Cyrus the work went on

slowly, and in the midst of much embarrassment. Afterward the enemies were enabled to find more sympathy with the successors of Cyrus, especially in Artaxerxes, as detailed in the fourth chapter of Ezra, until the work, by royal command, was brought to a standstill. Space does not allow us to enter into discussion and explanations concerning the condition of the Persian Empire or kingdom during the stormy years of battle, rebellion, and strife which went on after the death of Cyrus until the reign of Darius. About fifteen years had elapsed since work on the Temple had ceased. In the meantime, the provinces of the kingdom were much unsettled, and the Jews (with other weak colonies) had suffered much from the incursions and raids of the rebellious neighboring princes. Civil war had raged around them, and armies passed over their lands and fields. Famine had followed upon war, and a state of general and lamentable distress had set in. It was at this time that Haggai, the prophet of the Lord, appeared among them and began to stir up the people again concerning the building of the Temple. He reproached them for allowing the work to cease for so long a time, while they were dwelling in ceiled houses and looking entirely after their own personal interests. He declared that much of their trouble and distress was owing to their unfaithfulness in the matter of the Temple. It is true that under a former dynasty they had been stopped from building; but they had not taken advantage of opportunities which had opened up in the meantime. In fact, they had settled down into a kind of despair, saying that the time for rebuilding the Temple had not come, and losing both faith and heart in the enterprise. For an account of the first message of the prophet to them, read the first chapter of Haggai's prophecy. To allow the work of the Lord to cease is a certain way to spiritual decline, for nothing is so disastrous to the cause of Christ as inactivity and the cessation of aggressive work. We must expect the enemies to hinder and harass us, but we are in no case to give in and say, "It is not the Lord's time to work." It is always God's time; and God's people must always be on the alert to take advantage of every opportunity for pushing on this work.

I.—A DESPONDENT PEOPLE.

The first effect of the stirring rebuke of the prophet was to arouse the people to a sense of their duty, and to awaken among them a little enthusiasm in the re-undertaking of the work of building. The spirits of the governor, of the high-priest, and all the people "were

stirred up, and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." (Haggai i, 14.) But a very few weeks passed, and the momentary enthusiasm again died away. It is true that God had promised them, saying, "I am with you"; but this was not sufficient encouragement to them against the mourning and croaking of the old men, who pointed out the comparative meanness of the proportions of this new Temple. They remembered the Temple of Solomon when the Ark was there, when the Shekinah was over the mercy-seat, and the thousands of costly vessels of gold and the golden shields were there; they recalled the magnificence of those days, and the fact that the Temple was overlaid with pure gold, and that regal magnificence was everywhere present; and they were probably saying to the younger men: "What is the use of rebuilding this Temple? You can never restore the old glory; at best when this one is finished it will be a poor affair; and what will the Temple be without the Ark, the mercy-seat, the Shekinah, and the Urim and Thummim? Why not be content with the altar which we at least have still, and on which we can offer the necessary sacrifices? Besides, we are too poor to go on with the work. Here is the end of the harvest, the time for a festival of gladness and joy, and our fields are bare, our crops are blighted, and we are on the verge of ruin. (Haggai i, 7-11.) It was indeed a dark hour with them. The promise of God and the providence of God seemed not to agree together, and the voices of the old and discouraged men prevailed to quench the young fires of enthusiasm which had begun to burn afresh in the hearts of the people. Nothing is so disastrous to the cause of God as discouragement. God can do nothing with a disheartened, hopeless man. Besides, it is a notable fact that a few croakers and discouraging men in a church or a community can do more in a week to hinder the work of God than a whole brigade of enthusiasts can do to set the work forward. How often do we fall upon exactly the same thing now as is here depicted. The old people are discouraged; they see their poverty; they contrast the present with the past (always unfavorably); they know that they have not long to live, and the present order will last through their day; and so they discourage all forward movements and "hinder the work."

II.—SYMPATHY AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

At this critical moment the prophet appeared again to Zerubbabel and Joshua and to the "residue of the people." (Haggai ii, 2.) In his former address the prophet had spoken with words of burning

and sharp indignation. He now begins his address with more sympathy and consideration, especially for the old and discouraged men. He was himself an old man, and also remembered the Temple of Solomon and its glories.

1. Sympathy.—"Who is there among you that saw this house in her first glory?" "I know," he seems to say, "how naturally you look upon the present undertaking with sadness, and can feel no pride in the building, for even when it is finished, in your eyes it will be as nothing in comparison with the former Temple. At best this to you is but a day of small things." (Zech. iv, 10.) "I have naturally something of the same feeling myself, but we are to look beyond to possibly better things in store for us, according to the promise and purpose of God." It must be right for us to go forward not looking backward, since it is God's command and God's work. He will take care of his own. We are but his servants, and the glory is not ours but his. God does not repeat himself. It is well enough to look back over the past and thank God for it, and learn by the experience gained there, but it is never wise to make the past our standard for the future. It is better, it *must* be better, farther on, if only we are faithful to the present duty.

2. Encouragement.—Turning from the old men and their depression, he now speaks stirring words to Zerubbabel, to Joshua, and to the people. In the former interview he rang out rebuke. "Consider your ways." "Consider your ways." Now he shouts out, with enthusiasm in his voice, and inspiration in his spirit: "Be strong." "Be strong." "Be strong." The same word for the governor, the high-priest, and the people. God's work *is* difficult work; it *will be* opposed by enemies who will seek to embarrass and hinder. Therefore it requires that we be strong. "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," said Paul to the Ephesians. "Quit you like men." "Only be strong and of good courage," said the Lord to Joshua the great captain, when he was about to lead the people up into the land. "And work," said the aged prophet. There is no use of stirring up your spirit and making you strong in purpose unless you also "work." Lay your hands to the business before you. Don't stop to conciliate all your enemies and get all your difficulties out of the way; but begin and "work," "work," "work." "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," said Jesus. "I must work," again he said, and yet again: "My meat and my drink is to work." Surely, then, it is not for us to sit idly down discussing the business of building God's house, but to throw ourselves at once into the work. "Work in faith and labor in love, and the

end is certain to be all and more than we could ask or think, for God is able to make the labor of our hands abound and prosper."

3. Promises.—He does not bid them work blindly, but encourages them with good promises in the name of the Lord. He had already repeated to them the word of the Lord: "For I am with you" (Haggai i, 13); and now he reiterated these words to them (v. 4). If God be with us it does not matter how many or who are against us. We cannot fail when working together with him. We must not fall into the mistake of interpreting God and his promises by outward circumstances, but rather let us learn how to read circumstances in the light of God's promise. The prophet further reminded them that God had not forgotten his covenant which he made with them when they came out of Egypt. (Ex. xxix, 45, 46.) They had suffered "his breach of promise" (Num. xiv, 34), by forgetting and disobeying him, but now that they had returned to them he renewed the old covenant with them. Moreover, "My spirit remaineth among you." As a matter of fact, though God had sent them into exile and removed his Shekinah from them, his Spirit had never left them, and dwelt among them still. How good God is to us. Even though he is compelled to withdraw his face from us because of our sins, yet does he not utterly abandon us, and with everlasting mercies he returns to us. "Fear not," continued the prophet. Let nothing discourage you. God is with you, and will be faithful to his word, for his own name's sake. His honor and glory are at stake in this thing, therefore lay hand to work; stay not nor slacken till the house be completed. "Do the next thing."

III.—GREAT THINGS TO COME.

Now the prophet proceeds to interpret the past and to point out some things in the future. They were grieving because their recent calamities had so largely destroyed their ancient glories. He had by the destruction of their former Temple and by suffering them to be taken into exile "shaken" the nation to its very foundations. Well, that nation had been gathered about a visible temple, a visible king, and an external service. These were but the scaffoldings of a real building, the outward signs of a spiritual reality. They were never intended to be permanent, and therefore they were shaken down. This Temple was disappointing to the old men; it did not restore the old glory. Even so. God did not mean to restore the old glory, but to bring in a new glory. Even this Temple was not to be permanent. It also must be but temporary. There was to be another

shaking and another period of disturbance among the nations of the earth. "The heavens and the earth and the sea." These are strong figures of speech, taken from the most violent possible powers and elements in nature, to convey to them something of what was soon to take place among the nations. The empire of Darius would pass away amidst great commotion; Alexander the Great would rise, flourish, and perish amid splendid victories; the new Roman power would come, in the midst of which the glory of Greece would wane. In all these things God's guiding hand would be present. Old dynasties, old religions, and hoary superstitions would perish. The world would grow weary with the old order of things. All confidence in God and men would perish. In the meantime he would keep his people in comparative safety, and the present Temple would serve its purpose. Let them not lament the passing away of the former glory, nor belittle the existence of the present order. They did not know it, but God was even now training them to a more spiritual conception of himself, by withdrawing many of the outward glories of the old dispensation. He was weaning them from the house of the Lord to show them the Lord himself. He was teaching them that God was greater than the Temple, that his sway was beyond the narrow limits of their own little land, and that his purposes were widening out to embrace all nations. A new dispensation was coming. By looking forward and not backward, let them be prepared for it.

1. **"The Desire of all nations shall come."** (Haggai ii, 7.)—Hitherto the Jews had supposed themselves to be the only objects of God's care and purpose. The rest of the nations were of no consequence to them, or (in their judgment) of no consequence to God. But the prophet now opens up to them the fact that among all nations there was an expectation and a desire. Steadily the world was growing weary with the constant rise and fall of human governments, the conflict and strife between scores of old superstitions. The gods of the heathen were being seen to be vanity. The nations were longing for some revelation from heaven, some manifestation of power from on high in which they might find peace. This desire was to be fulfilled in the coming of Christ, "The Desire of all nations." This Temple which they were now building was to be the place of his advent. "He would suddenly come to his Temple." (Mal. iii, 1.) The Ark and the Shekinah of the old Temple which they were bemoaning were but the shadows which testified to the coming substance. When the shadows were shortened they might be sure that the substance was near at hand. Look not, then, back-

ward to the shadow, but forward to the substance. When he shall come to this house he will fill it with glory; aye, with a glory more resplendent than the glory which filled the Temple of Solomon when it was dedicated amid pomp and splendor. (II. Chron. vii, 1, 2.) They were discouraged because the glory had departed from the house of the Lord, but they would yet be filled with wonder at a new glory. Not indeed a glory that should captivate the eye. Not a material glory, but a spiritual and moral glory which should transform the spirit and charm the soul. As for the silver and the gold lacking in the construction and the furnishing of this house, the prophet expressly declared that they were not lacking because God had no power over these treasures of the earth, for "the silver and the gold are mine." God could easily fill this new Temple with white and yellow wealth; he could overlay it with gold until it would shine again as in days of old; but he was to adorn it with a better kind of gold. Faith "tried in the fire" and more precious than gold (I. Pet. i, 7) shall be the glory of the new dispensation to be inaugurated in this Temple, which to the old men seemed so mean by comparison with that of Solomon.

2. The glory of the latter house.—This new and less magnificent Temple was to have a glory all its own, in the more spiritual worship to be inaugurated in it, which, according to the estimate God puts upon things, rendered it more glorious than that of Solomon, even before the chief glory came, which in the days of his flesh came to pass, when Christ was presented there by his parents for consecration, when he afterward tarried there to discuss great questions with the doctors, when, as the "Messenger of the Covenant," he appeared and drove out the money-changers, and when in after years he trod its courts teaching, healing, and declaring God's love and forgiveness to sinners. The true glory of this prediction is to be understood in its relation to Christ. When Jesus was in the Temple (John ii, 18, 19) and the priests asked him for his authority for his actions there, he identified himself in some sort with it, saying: "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will build it again." The true glory of God is to be found in the spiritual treasures which he bestows on men, and not in the material wealth which he gives them. Had a thousand times more gold than Solomon lavished on his Temple been gathered for the adornment of this second one, it would have paled before the revelation of him who "is the express image of his Father's person and the very brightness of his glory." The same may be said of men, as is here taught concerning these two temples. The true glory of man is to be seen not in the splendor

of outward appearance, pomp, riches of apparel, and magnificence of dwellings, but in the righteousness and spirituality of their lives and characters. And if this is true of men, it is much more true of churches. That is the most glorious church where the Spirit and power of God are most habitually manifested in the spirituality of its members, and in the number of souls converted to God. There is many a splendid cathedral whose architectural glory and the wealth of whose plate and art treasures are as nothing in comparison with some little dissenting chapel or humble parish church where the Lord Christ is exalted before the people, and the Holy Spirit accompanies the more simple sermon of the unknown preacher, though it may not be printed and given to the world as the great intellectual effort of some man of fame.

3. "In this place will I give peace." (Haggai ii, 9.)—All the rites and ceremonies of Solomon's Temple never brought peace to the conscience, and all the glories of its architectural beauty and dazzling decorations never conferred comfort on a troubled soul. In that Temple there was "a remembrance every year, and in every sacrifice of sin"; but in this Temple Jesus the Prince of Peace came and preached peace—peace of conscience and rest of soul.

How little can we judge aright by looking on the outward appearance of things, either of men or places. Young David was better in God's sight than his stalwart elder brothers. The two mites of the poor widow were of more value in God's sight than all the great gifts of the proud rich men. When will we ever learn that great lesson that Paul teaches when he says: "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (II. Cor. iv, 18-v, 1.)

IV.

JOSHUA THE HIGH-PRIEST.—Zechariah iii, 1-10.

(1) And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. (2) And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? (3) Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. (4) And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. (5) And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the Lord stood by. (6) And the angel of the Lord protested unto Joshua, saying, (7) Thus saith the Lord of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by. (8) Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH. (9) For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. (10) In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree.—Zechariah iii, 1-10.

There are no less than twelve men of note in the Jewish Chronicles called by name Zechariah, but this prophet is the most distinguished of them all. He was (so far as we can gather) a much younger man than either of the contemporary prophets Haggai and Malachi. He was born in exile and came out with the first band under Ezra. He seems to have been associated intimately with Haggai, and the prophecies of this book were spoken about the same time, or a little later, than the stirring words uttered by Haggai, considered in our last study. He was (like his colleague) deeply interested in the building of the Temple; but his prophecies took a much wider range than did those of Haggai. While Haggai was stirring up the governor, the high-priest, and the people to go on with the work of building the Temple, Zechariah was projecting their thoughts far into the future, teaching them great spiritual lessons, and encouraging them with the assurances of God's unchangeable purpose of grace. In the first six chapters he delivers himself of no

less than eight prophetic visions, all bearing on the past, present, and future state of Israel. Perhaps it will be well to give a digest of these visions as expounded by Dr. Talbot W. Chambers of New York.

(i) The Man among the Myrtles; or, Successful Intercession for the Covenant People. (i, 7-17.)

(ii) The Four Horns and the Four Carpenters; or, An Adequate Defender against every Assailant. (i, 18-21.)

(iii) The Man with the Measuring Line; or, The Enlargement and Security of the People of God. (ii.)

(iv) Joshua the High-priest before the Angel of Jehovah; or, The Forgiveness of Sin and the Coming of "the Branch." (iii.)

(v) The Candlestick with the Two Olive Trees; or, The Positive Communication of God's Spirit and Grace. (iv.)

(vi) The Flying Roll; or, The Destroying Curse upon all Sinners. (v, 1-4.)

(vii) The Woman in the Ephah; or, The Permanent Exile of the Wicked. (v, 5-11.)

(viii) The Four Chariots; or, Jehovah's Judgments upon the Heathen. (vi, 1-8.)

The date of these prophecies (or series of prophetic visions) is the second year of the reign of Darius, B.C. 515.

The vision which is the subject of our present study is the fourth in this series, and is singularly beautiful and suggestive in its graphic imagery. These images are not the fruit of the poetic imagination of the prophet, but came to him and his fellow-workers by the inspiration of the Almighty. (i, 1.) All Israel's woes and misfortunes had been brought upon them on account of sin. Unless this curse could be removed from them, further and greater calamities would be their portion. Therefore (that they might enter into the glad hope of the future glory which is foreshadowed in the third vision), here is one in which they are made to see how God himself will put away their sin and raise them up a Saviour who shall be able alike to save and preserve them.

I.—THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN.

The account which Zechariah gives of his vision is a very condensed one; but its graphic power is so great that nothing is lost by the absence of details. With a few bold strokes of his pencil he sets the whole scene before us.

1. "The Angel of the Lord."—This being whom the prophet saw, and denominates "the Angel of the Lord," is not given a name;

but that he is the Angel of the Covenant who appeared so often in the early history of Israel there is no doubt. The second verse at once identifies him with Jehovah himself. He is represented as speaking directly in God's name, as though Jehovah himself were the speaker. (Gen. xviii, 1, 3, 14, 17.) The language which he uses toward Satan is so identical with that which Michael on a former occasion used toward him (Jude 9), that it is not difficult to identify him with the latter. If Michael is none other than Jesus himself (which I am strongly inclined to think), then this vision of him with Joshua standing before him, and what follows, is a very precious picture to us all; for all judgment is committed into his hands (John v, 22), and what he did for Joshua he is ready to do for all who come to "stand before him" as Joshua did.

2. "**Joshua the high-priest.**"—This is the same Joshua of whom we have already spoken. (Ezra ii, 2; iv, 3; Haggai ii, 2.) He was the high-priest of these Jews who had returned from Babylon to their own land under the decree of Cyrus. As such he represented them in their relation to God. His coming and standing before the Angel of the Lord represented the nation as standing there. Standing before Jehovah designated his position in service, in which he represented and personated the entire people over whom he was set as high-priest. (Deut. x, 8; II. Chron. xxix, 11; Judges xx, 28; Ezra x, 5.) In him, therefore, we may see the entire people; and what was said and done to Joshua was said and done as to them.

3. "**Satan, standing by.**"—Here we have another of those vivid glimpses of this enemy of God and accuser of men. He is the same who overthrew man in the garden (Gen. iii, 1); who accused and opposed himself to Job (Job i, 8); who confronted our Lord himself in the desert (Matt. iv, 1); who pursued our Lord all through his ministry, even to the last hours of agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and on Calvary; who entered into Judas, and who sought to possess himself of Peter, and who always is depicted as the deceiver and enemy of God's people. (I. Pet. v, 8, 9; Rev. xii, 9, 10.) The fact that Satan was seen standing by would indicate that he was present there as the accuser of Joshua, no doubt pointing to the filthy garments which were upon him as the reason why he should not be permitted to have favor with God. No doubt the accusations of Satan against the people of God are based on our sins. For his sin and rebellion he was cast out, and he insists that sinners of the human race shall have no more mercy than he had. (II. Pet. ii, 4.) We have had occasion in other studies to warn our readers against the tendency in modern days to make light of the personality of

Satan and even to deny the existence of any such malignant and mighty spirit in the world. The Scriptures are very full of testimony concerning him, and of most urgent warnings against his "wiles" and "devices." Paul is particular in his mention of him. (Eph. ii, 2; vi, 12, 16.) The following passages besides those already referred to may serve a useful purpose in following up the study of the Scripture with regard to this enemy: In Eden, Gen. iii, 1-15. As God of this world, II. Cor. iv, 4; John xiv, 30; Matt. xiii, 38, 39; I. Chron. xxi, 1; Job i, 6, 7; ii, 1, 2; Rev. xx, 10. The limitation of his power, Job ii, 6; I. Cor. v, 5; Matt. iv, 3, 5, 8, 9. His final overthrow, II. Tim. ii, 25, 26; I. John ii, 8; Heb. ii, 14; Rev. xx, 2, 7, 9, 10.

4. "**Satan rebuked.**"—Standing thus at the right hand of Joshua, "to resist him" in the presence of the Lord and to accuse him, the Lord speaks, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." At the beginning, after man had first sinned, the Lord called Satan forth, rebuked him, pronounced a curse upon him, definitely took the man's part against him, and prophesied the final overthrow of Satan by the "seed of the woman." (Gen. iii, 15.) So now the Lord rebukes Satan again. The details of this rebuke are not given, and perhaps there was no more than only this word. But it must have implied rebuke for his bitter enmity to man; for his daring presumption in accusing and resisting the salvation of the man whom he had himself tempted to sin; and for supposing that he could alter the purpose of God's grace toward sinners. The terms in which the rebuke was couched go to point out the defeat of Satan in his attempts thus to resist the high-priest. Never because the man is innocent of sin, but because God is gracious. Against man Satan may prevail, but against the purpose of God in grace toward guilty man he cannot prevail. "The Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee." Here indeed is the hope of sinners. It is not for our righteousness that we may stand before God; nor, on the other hand, are we cast off because we are sinners. It is God's gracious purpose and his free choice of us (though sinners) *in Christ* that affords us hope, and that enables us to stand against Satan himself, as well as against our own sense of sin and consciousness of guilt. (Titus iii, 3-7.) It is true that for their sins Israel had been cast, as it were, into the glowing furnace of affliction and sent into exile in Babylon; but God had "not forgotten to be gracious." If Satan supposed that because God had dealt with them in wrath in that matter he had therefore changed his purpose of grace, he was mistaken. The very circumstances that might have seemed to be

against them are now changed into an argument for them. "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" As though Jehovah had said to Satan, "It is true that my people" (represented by Joshua) "are, as it were, like a stick burnt with fire, but they are as a brand which I have plucked out with my own hand. Do you suppose I have thus snatched them out of that furnace only to cast them back into the fire?" The fact that God had rescued this remnant from Babylon was full proof that he intended further grace for them. Some nations who had been deported bodily from other lands were wont to mix with their captors and perish in that way as a distinct people; but God had preserved his people through all these bitter years, and now had brought them back to Judea, and he would not again cast them off.

5. "**The filthy garments removed.**"—In the vision the high-priest is seen clothed in filthy garments. These of course represented the sinful condition, not only of Joshua himself, but of the whole nation of which he was the spiritual and priestly head. The figure is a familiar one, and the interpretation is not difficult. Speaking of Israel and her sin, Isaiah says (lxiv, 6): "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." This thought is expressed by Paul when he describes his own salvation through Christ. (Phil. iii, 8, 9.) We are also reminded of the parable of the wedding-garment spoken of by our Lord, which suggests the same idea. (Matt. xxii, 11.) Could we but see ourselves as God sees us, this would be our condition, even at our best estate. "Clad in filthy garments." It was the salvation of Joshua that he did not flee away at the accusations of Satan, but that he stood there before the "Angel of the Lord." Just as it was the salvation of the woman (John viii, 9) that she did not flee away after our Lord had rebuked and sent off her accusers, but waited to know what he would say and do to her. So Joshua stood his ground, all clad in filthy garments as he was. Did we but know the heart of our Saviour better, we should the more readily come into his presence, even with our sins, because it is only by coming thus confessedly vile that we may hope for forgiveness. "God be merciful to me, the sinner" is our best plea always. Having rebuked Satan and declared his grace toward Jerusalem as his chosen people, and that he would not again fling into the fire the brand that he had but just plucked out, the Angel spake to those who were also standing before him (probably the accompanying angelic host), and commanded: "Take away the filthy garments from him." (Zech.

iii, 4.) The taking away of these filthy garments was not the condition of the forgiveness spoken a moment after, because it had already gone forth out of God's heart. "Behold, I *have* caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with a change of raiment." We are irresistibly reminded of the scene in the parable of the Prodigal Son, where the father runs to embrace and forgive his son in all his filthy rags and tatters and causes them to be replaced by the best robe. Thus did God assure his people that their sins and iniquities were forgiven, and that he himself would be "their righteousness." (Is. lxi, 10; Jer. xxiii, 6.)

6. The fair miter and the garments.—God not only forgives our sins and takes away the filthiness of the past life, but he also further adorns us, placing "a fair miter upon our heads," and clothes us "with salvation as with a garment." This reclothing of Joshua and the adornment with the miter points out to us the progressive work of the Spirit of God in achieving our salvation. First we have forgiveness, then justification, and after that sanctification, by which we are adorned and made increasingly like Christ in holiness wrought. (Rom. vi, 22; viii, 10, 11.)

7. Exhortation and promise.—Having reclothed Joshua, the Angel gives him a solemn charge, in which there is contained a great promise and a stated condition. "If thou wilt walk in my ways and keep my charge." (iii, 7.) These words refer alike to personal walk and to public service. All God's people have both these matters to attend to. Our personal life must be ordered according to the way of the Lord (Titus iii, 8), but it is not all the Christian life to maintain a blameless walk. God has his work to do in this world, and there are none to do it but those whom he has forgiven, justified, and called to be his saints. (I. Cor. iii, 9; II. Cor. vi, 1.) If we thus are faithful in walk and work, God will give us charge over his house and make us the keepers of his courts—that is, he will honor us in his service and cause the work of our hands to prosper. I can think of nothing more desirable than to be taken into partnership with the Lord in the great work of saving men, and to be honored with distinguished service. Besides this, "I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by." Those who were standing by (see also v. 4) were some glorious beings who had evidently accompanied the Angel; they are the "heavenly hosts." (Rev. xxii, 9.) Faithfulness in service will be rewarded with freedom of intercourse and communion, even companionship with the most glorious beings in the heaven of God. "An inheritance among the saints in light" is worth striving for. Not that we win heaven

by merit in any sense, but, as being forgiven and justified, our place among the sanctified will be determined by the measure and faithfulness of our obedience and service.

8. A glorious announcement.—Having finished his words of grace to Joshua in respect of the forgiveness of sins and the privilege and reward of service, by which all Israel was to be encouraged to persevere in the way of spirituality and devotion, the Angel makes a glorious announcement. The address was to Joshua and his fellow-priests, whom the angel designates as “men to be wondered at.” And indeed this is true of the people of God always. They are a wonder to themselves, that they should be forgiven and clothed in the righteousness of Christ and be called the sons of God and made so. (I. John iii, 1, 2.) They are wondered at by men of the world, that they should willingly turn their backs on the world and live for Christ and exhibit such marvelous changes in life and character. In the world of glory they will be objects of wonder and praise as they stand arrayed in white before the Lamb. The redeemed of the Lord have always been a wonder and even a puzzle to the world. Now the Angel makes an announcement not altogether new, but one which confirms all the declarations of the older prophets. “For, behold, I will bring forth my servant the BRANCH.” (Of this glorious being we have already written, “Bible Studies” for 1892, pp. 1-8, 33-42.) It is sufficient for us, therefore, to say here that this is the promise of the coming of Christ, in whom all the vision was to be fulfilled, who would be not only a Saviour to put away their sins, but a great overshadowing and sheltering tree. (Is. xi, 1; liii, 2; Jer. xxiii, 5; xxxiii, 15.) Amid their present troubles and the many fears arising out of their own consciousness of sin and weakness, they were to look forward and grasp the promise and grace of God in this glorious servant of God, the BRANCH.

II.—ISRAEL'S GOLDEN AGE.

Other nations look backward upon past and fading glories, but Israel is to look forward for her golden age. Some of the old men were disposed to weep when they remembered the glory of Solomon's Temple; but the prophet of the Lord is now pointing out to them that there is in the future yet greater glory and much higher blessing in store for them.

1. The stone laid before Joshua.—This stone was not symbolical of the Messiah of whom the Angel had just spoken, but of the nation now represented by Joshua. Poor, mean, and cast down into

the very mud and soil of present circumstance and misfortune, it seemed to be. But upon this one stone (one people among all the nations of the earth) there shall be "seven eyes," denoting the constant and watchful care of God during all the time that should intervene between that day and their coming glory. Moreover, this stone so rude and unsightly shall be engraved by God himself. He will fashion and adorn it and make it beautiful. There will be dark days, days in which it will seem that God has lost sight of his people; there will be times when it will appear that God has even forgotten Israel; but there will come a time when "in one day" the iniquity will be removed from that land, and from that people. That will be the day when at the Lord's second coming the Jews shall see and confess him. Then shall a nation be converted in a day; then shall the ancient people be restored to their land and "receive in it the double for all her sins." (Is. xl, 2; lxi, 7; Zech. ix, 9.)

2. The blessings of that day.—The figure of resting under the fig tree sets forth the blessings of Israel under the reign of Messiah. (i) Safety. When there is perfect peace and security in the land, then men sit under their vines and fig trees. (ii) Enjoyment. The very thought of it suggests delight. (iii) Freedom. Only free men and proprietors sit under their vines and fig trees. Neither slaves nor strangers do this. (iv) Benevolence and fellowship. For in that day the man sitting under vine and fig tree will wish to share his good things with his neighbors, and enjoy their fellowship in all the blessing of God's goodness and grace.

V.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD.—Zechariah iv, 1-10.

(1) And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, (2) And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: (3) And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof. (4) So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord? (5) Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. (6) Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. (7) Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. (8) Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, (9) The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. (10) For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth.—Zechariah iv, 1-10.

This fifth vision of Zechariah contains one or two Scripture passages which, through the ages, have become most familiar to the Church. The vision is that of a candelabrum and the two olive trees standing by, one on either side, the meaning of which is, in brief, the position of the people of God in this world and the positive supplies of divine grace vouchsafed to them. In writing out this vision, the prophet says that the Angel which talked with him came again, "and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep." That is to say, the interval of normal consciousness between the last vision and this one, in which he went about seeing, feeling, understanding, and acting in this world as other men, was, as it were, but as sleep as compared with the new consciousness which was his during these revelations which he was receiving. A sight of the unseen things of God, a glimpse into heaven and communication with the heavenly inhabitants, must be indeed as day is to night, in comparison with all that we are conscious of in this life.

So Zechariah speaks of our ordinary consciousness as sleep, in comparison with that quickened state in which a man sees heavenly visions. In the same way our natural life is spoken of as *death*, in comparison with the life which Jesus came to give to the world. "You hath he quickened" (brought to life) "who were dead in trespasses and sins." (Eph. ii, 1.) So Christians are called "the children of the light and of the day" in contrast with the children of the world or unconverted people, who are "of the darkness and of the night."

I.—THE GOLDEN CANDLESTICK.

What the prophet saw when he wakened out of his sleep of natural consciousness into that of prophetic light and life was, first, "a candlestick all of gold." (v. 2.) The description of it is substantially that of the golden candlestick of the first tabernacle and those of Solomon's Temple, yet it differs in one or two essential particulars, which the student may see by comparing the descriptions given of the two. (Ex. xxv, 31-37; I. Kings vii, 49.)

1. **All of gold.**—Let us look first of all at the material of which this candlestick was made. In this respect it corresponds with that described in Exodus and with the seven golden candlesticks seen by John in Revelation. (Rev. i, 12.) It is universally conceded that the candlestick of the Temple was symbolical of the people or Church of God. Certainly, if we are to be taught by comparing Scripture with Scripture, we are on sure ground when we say the candlestick stands for the Church of God, for John expressly tells us that Jesus (who appeared to him and showed him these candlesticks) said, "The seven candlesticks are the seven churches." (Rev. i, 20.) The vision of Zechariah was, then, of the people and Church of God. There was a disposition to look upon the Temple that was then being built with some contempt because of its comparative insignificance in point of grandeur when contrasted with the former Temple. We have before remarked that in the diminished proportions and the less resplendent glory of the second Temple, together with the absence of the Ark, the Shekinah, and the Urim and Thummim, God was preparing the people to look away from the shadow to the substance. In fact, the shadow was shortening and gradually fading away. The object of this vision was to call the attention of the people away from the Temple to the people of God, for whose sake only the Temple had an existence. The Temple was indeed a witness for God, but only as it was connected with his people. The Angel now wishes the people to understand that they are of more

importance than the Temple, and he sets them forth to themselves under this figure of the golden candlestick. The Temple they were building was poor in point of gold, but the people of God as seen in this vision were in God's sight all of gold, most precious not only in his sight but in fact. From this they were to gather comfort and dignity. However mean and poor this little discouraged colony might be in their own eyes, or in the eyes of their enemies, they were in God's sight a candlestick of pure gold, and all of gold. This is true of the Church of Christ under all circumstances. Oftentimes very feeble, obscure, and poor (usually so, indeed) in this world, she is always a magnificent light-bearer to the world, of pure gold, and of rarest workmanship.

2. The structure of the candlestick.—It was a stand having seven branches, which, as we have said, can but indicate the Church of God. "The seven lamps are the seven churches." The number seven is that number which stands for completeness, and therefore for the entire Church, the whole sum of the people of God, both of old and in the present dispensation. (i) "The bowl upon the top of it." (iv, 2.) This undoubtedly stands for the Lord himself, the head of the Church, from whom the whole Church draws its life and light. In the seven candlesticks of Rev. i, 20, Jesus is seen walking in the midst of them. Here the same truth is represented by the golden "bowl upon the top of it." It is the same truth that is conveyed to us by our Lord in the figure of the vine and the branches. (John xv.) "I am the vine, ye are the branches." He is the head "from whom the whole body is fitly joined together, and compacted." (Eph. iv, 16.) The bowl was for the purpose of holding the oil which fed the lamps on the various branches. This oil is the symbol of the Holy Spirit. The teaching is very plain. The Holy Spirit is the gift of the Father through Jesus, the Son. In him the Spirit dwelt in all fullness, and was given "to him without measure," for "in him all fullness dwelt." (John iii, 34; Col. i, 19.) (ii) "The seven lamps thereon" are the whole number of the people of God. The seven churches stand for the whole, and so each lamp may represent the individual believer as well, for the Church of Christ is only the aggregation of all the churches, and the churches are only the aggregation of individual believers. What is therefore true of the Church as a whole, in its relation to Christ, is true of each believer. (iii) "And the seven pipes to the seven lamps." This seems to indicate that there were seven feeding pipes leading from the great central bowl on the top to each one of the seven branches. A good many guesses have been made as to what

these pipes, attached one to each of the seven lamps, might mean. As they were the conductors of oil from the central bowl, in addition to the main stem by which the lamps were connected with the bowl, we must conclude that they were additional feeders to the seven lamps. Every church and every believer derives life, light, and strength directly from union with Christ; but it is not sufficient that we be in Christ. It has pleased God that the divine life shall be fed and increased by means of many ministries: for instance, the Word of God, which is the great sanctifier; the two ordinances of the Church, Baptism and the Lord's Supper; and the five ministries of the Church, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, given for the perfecting of the Church and the edification of the saints. (Eph. iv, 11, 12; I. Cor. xii, 28.) Thus it is that the Church lives by reason of her union with Christ, and her life is further sustained by seven ministries, that is, by a complete ministry which God has provided for us.

3. The function of the candlestick.—We have seen how the Church is of pure gold in character, and how it is allied to and made dependent upon Christ. It only remains for us now to consider the purpose for which this glorious candlestick is set in this world. Obviously the business of a candlestick or lampstand is to give out light in the midst of darkness. In the first place, Christ is the great light-giver. Speaking of the moral condition of the people, the Prophet Isaiah says: "Darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the people." (lx, 2.) Of the condition of the heathen world, Paul says, "Their foolish hearts were darkened." (Rom. i, 21.) Of Jesus, the prophet says, "The Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising"; "I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles." In fact, all prophecy is summed up concerning him as the coming "light of the world" in the declaration of Simeon: "For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." (Luke ii, 30-32; Is. xlii, 6; xlix, 6; lx, 3.) Introducing him to the world, John calls him "the light of the world," "the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world," and Jesus speaks of himself as "the light of the world," and tells us that "if any man will follow him he shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." So also the Church of Christ and every individual believer, by reason of union with Christ, and the oil supplied by him, is the great light-bearer in the world in the absence of the true Light himself. "Ye are the light of the world," Jesus said to his disciples. (Matt. v, 14-16.) And he bids us set our light on

a candlestick and let it shine, that others may be shown the right path. Again he warns us not to "let the light in us be darkness," for a Christian whose light is not shining gives forth grosser darkness even than a sinner does. Paul tells us that Christians are lights shining in the world, "holding forth the word of life." (Phil. ii, 15, 16.) So closely is Christ associated with his people. We are partakers of his nature, and partners with him in his great mission of lighting this dark world. He pours out the grace of his own life into our little lamps, feeds us constantly by the ministry of his Word, and bids us with and for him "shine as lights in the world." The glory of the Church is thus greater than the glory of the Temple, and this vision of the higher calling of the people of God was meant to compensate them for what seemed to be their loss in external and earthly circumstance and glory.

II.—THE TWO OLIVE TREES.

Standing beside and on either side of the golden candlestick with its branches and pipes were two olive trees. These excited the curiosity of the prophet, and he asked the Angel what they were, that is, what they signified. To this question the Angel replied by a question expressing surprise that the prophet did not understand the meaning. "Knowest thou not what these be?" We are reminded of the question of Jesus to Nicodemus: "Art thou a master in Israel and knowest not these things?" (John iii, 10.) It would imply that the prophet ought to have understood the symbol without interpretation, as he evidently saw the meaning of the candlestick. The prophet, however, frankly replied, "No, my Lord." Even if we should know and do not, it is better to confess our ignorance than to pretend to knowledge. A vain ignorance bars the way to knowledge, but a humble ignorance is sure to be taught if instruction is sought. The Angel does not answer by a direct exposition, but by an implied one setting forth the truth that lay at the heart of the symbol. However, further on in the chapter (twelfth to fourteenth verses) there is a direct exposition of the two olive trees. "These are the two anointed ones" (or "sons of oil") "that stand by the Lord of the whole earth." There is little doubt that the primary reference is to Zerubbabel the prince and Joshua the high-priest, into whose hands the works of rebuilding the Temple and re-establishing the people of God in the land were intrusted. It must not be understood, however, that these two men were in themselves the sources of oil for the candlestick, but in their offices as

prince and priest they stand for the kingly and priestly characters of Christ, through which offices God has ministered life and grace to his people in all ages. The two olive trees, then, come to signify Christ himself standing on either side of his Church, the living source of life and of grace, ministering according to the eternal purpose of God, in this sense being the great Servant of the Father, and doing his will toward the people whom he will save. (Heb. x, 7-14; Is. liii, 10-11.) This vision has in it great encouragement for believers. The lamps of the candlestick are supplied from living trees, that is, from the living and perpetual sacrifice of Christ, who, "having offered himself to God for our sins, is now set down at the right hand of power" invested with all grace and might alike for our protection and defense. The believer looks forever to Christ as the ground of his justification, through sacrifice, and ever to him also as the Power of God for the maintenance of spiritual life and the certainty of victory over all enemies and opposing powers.

III.—THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT.

Before giving a detailed or categorical answer to the prophet concerning the two trees, the Angel abruptly announces to him the lesson which he desires him to communicate to Zerubbabel.

1. The source of all power.—"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." The undertaking in which these two men, and especially Zerubbabel (as the prince of the people), were engaged was a herculean one. They were surrounded by enemies; they were a comparatively small band of colonists; they were poor; they had no real political power, and no armies to give defense, security, or protection while at their work. God would remind Zerubbabel therefore, in the first place that he was not to look to human resources alone, or to mere might of human strength for the doing of his work; and on the other hand he must not be discouraged because of the apparent inadequacy of his strength and resources. God's promises are not accomplished "by might or by power" (that is, human might and power), but by a divine and supernatural interposition, "by my Spirit." Looking backward over the past history of God's people and their achievements, we see these two truths abundantly illustrated. The children of Israel were raised to power and great glory as a nation, not by their own might and power, but by the constant interposition of God's supernatural help. He brought them up out of Egypt "by a high hand," in the face of all the splendid armies of Pharaoh; he gave them possession

of the land which he had promised them by an invisible power which made the walls of Jericho to fall down, and, in spite of their armies, when they went up against Ai without God's permission they were driven back and defeated. So it was throughout all their history: when God was with them there was no power of earth that could withstand or overthrow them; while, on the other hand, when through sin they had forfeited the presence of God's Spirit and power, all the armies they could muster were insufficient to save them. Again, in the case before us: it was not "by might or by power" that their exile had come to an end, but by the Spirit of God, who had moved the heart of Cyrus to publish his decree setting them free from bondage in Babylon. In the New Testament times we have the same lesson taught us. Our Lord would not suffer his disciples to go forth to the conquest of western Asia and Europe by their own might and power. He shut them up in Jerusalem for ten days, until they were "endued with power from on high," which came upon them by the descent of the Holy Spirit from heaven. Paul explains the success of his preaching when he says his gospel came not in word only but also "in power and in the Holy Ghost." (I. Thess. i, 5.) He gives expression to the like truth in other places. The Gospel which to the world seems as foolishness is "to them that believe" the power of God and the wisdom of God. His preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. "For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power." (Rom. i, 16; I. Cor. i, 18; ii, 4; iv, 20.) On the other hand, he utterly disclaims any thought of that power residing inherently in himself; for he says frankly: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." (II. Cor. iii, 5.) It is the same profound truth which is taught positively by Jesus Christ when he tells his disciples that without him they could do nothing (John. xv, 5), and to which Paul responds by saying, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Phil. iv, 13.) Let us all learn this lesson with respect to the work of God: Our own *insufficiency*, but God's *all-sufficiency* in all things. We must neither be overconfident because of our own resources or strength, nor discouraged for the want of apparent strength and means; but confidently expect that God's "strength is made perfect in weakness." (II. Cor. xii, 9.)

2. Zerubbabel and the mountain.—In illustration of this truth the Angel speaks to an imaginary mountain (or possibly to one seen in the vision), before whom Zerubbabel was standing, as if impeded by its towering height and solid and immovable strength. "Who

art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." The difficulties before the Prince of Judah and his brethren were like a great mountain which defied them; but God says to that mountain, that before his servant (strengthened as he would be by his Spirit) it should be leveled to a plain. Thus shall difficulties and obstacles vanish away before the power of the Spirit of God. Thus have they ever done before the people of God. "Who will roll us away the stone?" said the women as they went their way to the sepulcher of Jesus. The answer was seen when they drew near, for God's angel had taken it away. No human power was available for this, but Heaven's resources are not confined to human means. As a matter of fact, in a wonderful way difficulties have ever been removed. Their enemies were now silenced and beaten, and Darius was moved to ratify all that Cyrus had ordered, and himself became eventually their friend. Zerubbabel had not only laid the foundations of the new Temple, but now he is assured that by his hands the building should be completed, even to the setting up of the corner-stone, and that it should be dedicated with shouts of joy, and all the world would ascribe the finished work to the grace of God, crying, "Grace, grace unto it." In the finishing of "the house" they should have proof of the truth that the prophet's vision was of God. It is in the fulfillment of prophecy that we have to-day the strongest proofs of the truth of God's Word.

3. The day of small things.—There were those, even among the returned exiles, who were disposed to hold in contempt the feebleness of their present condition, and from their own weakness to argue unfavorably for the future. Their enemies were mocking and taunting them with the hopelessness of their task. It was emphatically "a day of small things." The angel puts this to them by way of rebuke, and then assures them that they shall yet see Zerubbabel triumphant, in spite of the appearances then against him. With plummet in hand they should see him measuring the completed Temple from cap-stone down to the foundations, in the midst of the acclamations of the people. The "seven eyes" of the Lord were watching over the work, and "running to and fro through the earth," having all things under his own direction. God's spiritual work has always begun by a day of small things. Abraham, a solitary man going out from his home "into a country he knew not of," Moses going alone down into Egypt, David with his sling and little stone, and these feeble Jews in the midst of hostile peoples, and with unbelievers and even traitors in their own camp; later on, Jesus, first as the Babe of Bethlehem, and then the despised and rejected

Son of man hanging shamefully crucified between two thieves, a little band of fishermen confronting all the pagan systems of Europe, and Luther alone in the face of all the powers of Europe, "then under the thumb of the pope"—these were all feeble beginnings of mighty endings. Here in India, where this is written, it is quite common to sneer at the conquests of the Gospel among the low castes and the poor, but even now we can hear and feel the ground-swell of advancing power and the very empire trembling under the tread of their many times ten thousand feet on the mountains, and in the plains, publishing the glad tidings and giving experimental demonstration of its power. Despise not the day of small things, for in God's hands they are the beginning of great things.

VI.

DEDICATING THE TEMPLE.—Ezra vi, 14–22.

(14) And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. (15) And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. (16) And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, (17) And offered at the dedication of this house of God a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. (18) And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses. (19) And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. (20) For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. (21) And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat, (22) And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.—Ezra vi, 14–22.

Discouraged and disheartened, the people had allowed the work on the Temple to cease, after the foundations had been laid, for about sixteen years. Even Zerubbabel and Joshua seem to have acquiesced in this state of inactivity, having probably reached the conclusion that the completion of the house of God, under present circumstances, was quite an impossibility. What with enemies about them, enemies at the court of the Persian king, their own fewness of number, and increasing poverty, they had truly good human reason for feeling discouraged. It was at this time that Haggai and Zechariah, the two prophets, came upon the scene. The scathing rebukes and satire of the one and the heavenly encouragements of the other at last awakened these discouraged Jews to recommence the work. (v, 1, 2; Haggai i, ii; Zech. i–vi.) The value and importance of a faithful ministry has nowhere a better illustration than in the presence of these two prophets, so different

in their gifts, among the people "helping them." (v, 2.) Without their presence the poor Jews would never have aroused themselves to resume and complete their work. Again, we may observe that a ministry without the living Word of God inspiring it is without power to arouse the people.

In the beginning of the work the returned exiles had to contend with malignant enemies, who were determined that they should not build again the house of the Lord; not, perhaps, that they cared anything about the matter itself, but because Cyrus had apportioned a large part of the revenues of the province toward the work, and this interfered with their own schemes of government speculation. When the house of the Lord is being builded it naturally interferes with the vices and wickedness of men, who in their turn vindictively seek to hinder the work of God. Nor were the Jews allowed to resume their work without further opposition. This time, however, it was not from any malignant hatred or opposition. Tatnai and the governors or satraps on that side of the river were attracted by the resumption of work, and went to make inquiry concerning it, naturally being suspicious of any such formidable undertaking as that in their royal master's dominions. They were met by the rulers of the people, with the explanation of their work, referring to the fact that nearly twenty years before they began to build under a decree of the great Cyrus. Of this decree the governor knew nothing, but was by the Jews referred to the treasury records. These governors made report of this interview to the then ruling king Darius Hystaspes, who, himself ignorant of the decree of the matter, caused inquiry to be made, and found a copy of that famous document, the decree of Cyrus, in the record house of the empire, and at once confirmed it, granting large revenues from these very provinces to enable the Jews to go forward with their work. Thus, indeed, did God make the kings of the earth to be the patrons of their work, as he had promised. (Is. xlix, 23.)

The sixth chapter of this record reveals a strange mixture of motives on the part of Darius, which is suggestive of how the Spirit of God works in connection with the natural movements of the human heart, and goes far to show how divine sovereignty may be reconciled with the free will of man.

I.—FINISHING THE TEMPLE.

Our study opens properly with the fourteenth verse, in which we see how many agencies work together with God for the carrying for-

ward of his work. First we have the elders of the Jews (by whom we are to understand, not only Joshua the high-priest and Zerubabel the prince, but also the chief men and heads of families), with the priests and Levites, who were set over the work as overseers and directors. Then the people, who did the actual hard labor under direction of the elders, the priests, and Levites. Then we have the two great prophets who were always present, encouraging and inspiring them with the Word of God as they received it fresh from the Spirit, and as they rehearsed it from the more ancient sacred Scriptures, bringing forth, "like good scribes of the kingdom, things both new and old" from the storehouse of truth. The commandment of God was their authority for all that they did. Every work must prosper and go forward to completion which is done according to the direction of God, just as every work done in violation of his commandment must in the end come to destruction. The secular governors, though not caring for or being influenced by God's command, had nevertheless respect to the old decree of Cyrus, which Darius, the present king, had confirmed and enlarged. Artaxerxes is mentioned in this record as also being a helper in the work, though as a matter of fact he did not reign until long after this period. He did, however, during his reign, order certain extra work to be done for the beautifying of the Temple, and in this sense he was also a helper. This latter incident suggests that this record was not written until years after the Temple was finished, probably in the later years of Ezra's life, when as an old man he wrote his history of these events, adding such reminiscences as were of sufficient importance to put into the record; in this case giving honor to Artaxerxes, to whom also honor was due. Though he did comparatively little, and, as it were, at the eleventh hour, yet he did it out of good will, and according to his opportunity, and so he has honorable mention among the Gentile kings who helped the people of God. No man who helps the people of God in their work for him will be forgotten of God, albeit neither heaven is won nor grace given as a reward of human merit.

1. "**They builded.**"—There is much suggestion and inspiration in this expressive term. The context shows that they did their work with enthusiasm. Inspired by the words of the prophets, stimulated by the favoring command of the king, anxious lest anything might again interrupt the work, they worked with a will, with gladness, and with hope, for in the completion of that house they naturally anticipated a revival of their own nationality and the fulfillment of all the glorious promises of God. It was in

no haphazard work that they were engaged. They were building *for* God and *with* God, and according to God's command. How important that these three elements should enter into all our work! No work that is not ultimately for God's glory can be of any possible use to us or to any one else; no work that is carried on without God can ultimately come to a useful conclusion. No work that is not done according to God's command will in the end answer the purpose which the builders have in view. All this applies to our own lives and spiritual work. We are commanded to "build up ourselves on our most holy faith" (Jude 20); to build up our spiritual character and life by adding and mixing into our faith all the virtues of the Spirit (II. Pet. i, 5-7); we are bidden to "edify one another" (I. Thess. v, 11); and to "build ourselves together." Thus building up personal character, having a care for each other's spiritual welfare, and working together in God's order and with the gifts which he has conferred, ministers with their people and the people with their ministers, and with each other, the whole Church, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit." (Eph. ii, 20-22.

2. They prospered.—All went well with these returned exiles, now that they once again laid their hands and their hearts to the work. All the circumstances were favorable to them. First, they had the command of God; then they had the presence of two ministers who encouraged them with divinely inspired words; then they had the favor of the king under whose dominions for the present their land was. They had also a large spiritual hope for themselves and their posterity, of which this Temple was to be the pledge and guarantee. It was the sign and symbol of God's presence again among them as a nation after their long exile. All these things tended to awaken in their hearts a great enthusiasm which sent the work along rapidly and successfully. Every element of prosperity was in their present condition and circumstances. God's people do not always have such favorable outward surroundings to cheer them on, whether in doing the outward work in connection with the spreading and enlarging of God's kingdom, or in the building up of their own spiritual lives. Sometimes the work is very hard and discouraging, when all outward circumstances seem against them, as when the work on this Temple was begun nearly twenty years before, and under which their enthusiasm had died down, and the work ceased; but it still remains true that all work undertaken for God

and in accordance with his commands is certain in the end to prosper. It is said of the righteous, that "whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Ps. i, 3); and the Apostle encourages the Corinthian Christians to be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (I. Cor. xv, 58); and in like manner he urges the Galatian Christians not to be weary in well doing, for the reason that they were sure to reap in due time provided they fainted not. (Gal. vi, 9, 10.) In like manner the Psalmist assures us that "he that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." (Ps. cxxvi, 6.) This should encourage us to steadfastness in work and service, even when it seems to be unsuccessful. Our Lord's finished work never was so prosperous as when his sun seemed to go down in darkness, tragedy, and blood, when he was "taken and by wicked hands crucified and slain." (Acts ii, 23.)

3. They finished it.—Not only so, but they finished it according to the commandment of the God of Israel. It is needful not only to begin and carry forward God's work, but to finish it. Jesus said that his meat and drink was to do the will of his Father who sent him, and to finish his work. (John iv, 34.) In his last prayer he declared that he had finished that work (John xvii, 4), and on the cross he reiterated the fact that his work was "finished." (John xix, 30.) Paul alluded to his work when he said, "I have finished my course." (II. Tim. iv, 7; Acts xx, 24.) Our work will not be finished as long as we have life and strength to work. God's work goes on by the hands of others, and will continue to go forward till it is finished, and the whole family of God is gathered into the living temple which he is building for himself. However, there are certain tasks which we are set to do which even in our lifetime we may finish and with joy dedicate to God as these Jews did the second Temple. God, who begins the good work of grace, will finish it in us, and we also ought to strive to carry forward to completion every charge we are given, according to the commandment of God.

II.—THE TEMPLE DEDICATED.

It must have been a most joyous occasion when they saw the cap-stone set, and when Joshua, Zerubbabel, and the prophets declared the work done, and that it was now ready to be dedicated to God. There is a suggestive round in the service of God. We first dedicate ourselves and our means to God in order to do his work, and

then we dedicate our work to God before going on to further service. The ceremony of dedication was arranged after the great service in connection with the dedication of the first Temple by Solomon. (I. Kings viii; II. Chron. vii.) These exiles had looked back ruefully to the glories of the Temple, and had contrasted with it their diminished work, but they were determined to follow in the pathway of that great service, and gave their rebuilt Temple to God. The work of our hands may not be as great and glorious in outward appearance as that of some of our predecessors, yet the acceptance of our work with God does not depend on its external greatness, but upon the sincerity of the motive with which we bring it to him. They may not have fully understood the words of the prophet which declared that this "day of small things" would be greater in point of glory than was the first Temple, yet they gave it to God in faith. We often look back at the good old days of the fathers, and mourn that our work is not as great and glorious as theirs; yet it is possible for our work to be as great as and even greater than that of our predecessors, if we "build according to the commandment of God."

1. All the people had part in it.—The household of God is made up of many members. Some are princes, some high-priests, some simple priests, and some Levites, and always the greater part are but "the common people"; but all have had their part in God's work, and so we read that "the rest of the children of the captivity kept the dedication of the house of God." God has no children too small, too young, too poor, or too obscure to be allowed to take part in his work and to share in the offerings at the dedication; and God accepts such service and the work which precedes it, not according to outward bulk or show, but according to ability, to good-will, and greatness of faith.

2. It was a service of joy.—"And the children of Israel kept the dedication of the house of God with joy." It is striking to note how much is said of "joy" by both Ezra and Nehemiah in connection with the return of the exiles and the building again of the Temple. Joy is one of the great fruits of the Spirit, and perhaps there is no such measure of joy in this universe as that connected with the gospel and the service of God. For joy Jesus endured the cross; there is joy in heaven over the conversion of one sinner; we are told of great joy in Samaria over the conversion of many during the mission of Philip to that city. We know from experience that there is no such joy in this life as that connected with the prosperity of God's work among men. These returned exiles were filled

with joy because in the completion of this Temple they were reminded of their return from captivity, of the return of God's favor to them after their long period of chastisement, and of the coming glory promised to them and their children. We should exhaust our space were we to recount all the causes of joy, and the joys of the Lord, in connection with the life and the service of his beloved Son. So we must leave it for our readers to fill up the gaps for themselves.

3. The offerings.—The building which they had just finished was given to God, yet it was still the instrument of service in their hands and a means of grace and glory. Their dedication was, therefore, held in connection with the proper use and service of the Temple. The hundred bullocks, the two hundred rams, and the four hundred lambs were a small offering in comparison with the barbaric profusion of offerings with which Solomon dedicated his Temple; but it is not by many or few gifts that our service is accepted of God, but, as we have noted before, according to ability and motive. There is, however, in this account of the dedication a pathetic note in connection with the "sin-offering." This of course was a part of the whole series of offerings prescribed by the law of Moses; but the account singles it out and specifies that there were twelve "he-goats for a sin-offering for all Israel." Here we have first a solemn confession and remembrance of the sins of the nation. It was through sin that they had been scattered and carried away captive, and their beautiful city and Temple laid waste and desolate. In the midst of their joy this day they make solemn confession of that sin, and thus mingle bitter herbs with their spiritual sacrifice. That there was a he-goat for each of the tribes of Israel suggests that though these returned exiles were of Judah and Benjamin only, they still remembered the ten tribes from whom they had been separated for centuries in national life, and who were now practically lost among the nations whither they had been scattered. They were their brethren, and in the midst of their joy they enrolled their names and prayed for them. In our joy and in our sorrows we should always remember our brethren and "pray for all men, especially those of the household of faith." It is also worthy of note that this service was conducted with the utmost order. "And they set the priests in their divisions, and Levites in their courses, for the service of God which is at Jerusalem, as it is written in the law of Moses." There seems to have been a thorough determination to restore the worship of God to its primitive exactness. The law of Moses was again brought out and reverently and minutely complied with. Old land-

marks and old paths were studied, that the people might not err again as they had done in past years, wherein they had followed the ways of "the son of Nebat which made Israel to sin."

III.—CELEBRATING THE PASSOVER.

Undoubtedly the greatest and most suggestive of all the feasts of the Jews was that of the passover. On that account it was meet that it should be celebrated, but now, especially as the ceremonies of dedication coincided in point of time with the exact anniversary of the first celebration of that great feast (when the children of Israel went up out of Egypt), it made the present celebration peculiarly appropriate. On six great occasions the passover is mentioned in the Scriptures—five times after the first celebration in Egypt: in the wilderness while on their way up out of Egypt; by Joshua, before beginning the siege of Jericho, at Gilgal; once in the days of Hezekiah; in the eighteenth year of good King Josiah; and now on this memorable occasion. (See Ex. xii; Num. ix; Josh. v; II. Chron. xxx; II. Kings xxiii, 21.) In each case the celebration of the passover marked a turning of the people again to God. In the case before us there must have been the thought of Egypt and the deliverance out of that land in connection with their own recent deliverance, and the passover took on a new significance to them.

1. The purifying of the people.—The correct reading of the twentieth verse would give us the idea that the "priests" were more or less defiled with certain idolatrous and immoral practices, from which the Levites were pure. So it fell to the Levites to offer for the purifying of the priests and for the people of the captivity, as well as for themselves. The passover feast is that of redemption, pointing in an especial manner to the one great sacrifice of Christ. (I. Cor. v, 7.) In coming to Christ the wicked must forsake his way and the unrighteous his thoughts (Is. lv, 7); not that personal righteousness is the condition of coming to Christ, but we may not come to him and receive the benefits of redemption unless there is a willingness and a purpose to forsake sin. Justification is the way to sanctification, and may not be had unless the other blessing is also desired.

2. The enlarged company.—Besides those of the children of the captivity, there are mentioned "such as separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land." This probably has reference to certain Jews who had been left in the land, "of the poorest of the people," and who had lapsed into the idola-

trous and immoral practices of the heathen around them; or it may have reference to certain Babylonians who had become proselytes and come up with the children of the captivity. In any case, it suggests that a real revival of religion is certain to recover to God both the backslidden and the hitherto estranged, and thus the fellowship of the people of God was enlarged that day, for "they all did eat." The turning of their hearts to Christ makes all men brethren. Kinship to him makes us kin to each other, for he is the great "Kinsman or Redeemer" of all men. (Ruth iv, 3, 4.)

3. The feast of unleavened bread.—In addition to the passover, for seven days this feast was also kept, as a sign of thorough turning away from sin and a dedication of themselves to holiness. (See Ex. xii, 15; xiii, 7; Lev. xxiii, 6; I. Cor. v, 7, 8.) Communion with Christ our Passover means thorough purification of the flesh and of the life. The end of God's salvation is "holiness unto the Lord." The feast was kept with joy—in their case joy for temporal deliverance and present prosperity, in our case joy for the deliverance from sin, and the saving grace of God and the promises of glory with him.

VII.

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER.—Nehemiah i, 1-11.

(1) The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, (2) That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. (3) And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. (4) And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven, (5) And said, I beseech thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: (6) Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. (7) We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. (8) Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: (9) But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. (10) Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. (11) O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.—Nehemiah i, 1-11.

The Book of Nehemiah was formerly a part of the Book of Ezra, or rather in the old Jewish canon these two books were considered as one. This will probably account for the formula at the beginning, "The words of Nehemiah," to mark off this part of the book from that of which Ezra was the author. Nehemiah's is a personal narrative, and is, in fact, a continuation of the story of the re-settlement of Jerusalem by the Babylonian exiles. Ezra's story is principally concerning the rebuilding of the Temple, which was begun under Cyrus and finished twenty years afterward under the patronage of Darius Hystaspes, and some account of the further work of

colonization, or rather re-colonization and restoration of the old national life of the people and temple worship. Up to the time of Nehemiah it is most probable that no attempt had been made to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem or its towers of defense. The renewed Temple stood on the old site, but it stood alone, without defensive forts and without the palace; the walls of the city were yet heaps of ruins, and in many other respects Jerusalem was but a sorry city. Little or no prosperity had as yet come to the people. They were poor and miserable upon the whole, and were evidently hated and despised by their surrounding neighbors. Ezra was a man full of zeal, piety, and resources, but Joshua and Zerubbabel seem not to have been men of very great ability, as witness the fact that they had allowed the work of rebuilding the Temple to lapse for sixteen years, and only moved again when the prophets Haggai and Zechariah appeared on the scene to stir them up and watch over them. Years had now passed away since the Temple had been dedicated with such great joy. Darius, their second kingly friend, had passed away with his dynasty, and Artaxerxes Longimanus had ascended the throne. He also had from the beginning shown himself friendly toward the Jews, as seen by the fact that Ezra had coupled his name with that of Cyrus and Darius, and also that he had made a large royal grant to beautify the Temple after it had been finished under the reign of his predecessor. (Ezra vii.) The whole period of time between the first return under Ezra and the date at which our present study begins must have been not far from eighty years, or about sixty years from the finishing of the Temple. During this time, as I have already said, affairs in Jerusalem had fallen into a very low and distressful condition. At the court of Artaxerxes there was a young Jew, our Nehemiah, who seems to have been a great favorite with the king and occupied the high and honorable position of "cupbearer." (v. 11.) It does not appear that Nehemiah had ever been to Jerusalem, or that up to this time he had been in any particular or special way interested in the affairs of his countrymen. There was naturally but little intercourse between the court of the great king and the feeble and distant colony of the Jews. Nehemiah, however, like many of his countrymen and fellow-religionists, was a devoted and pious Jew. He kept firmly to his faith in the foreign court, like Daniel and Ezra, and seems not in any wise to have been hindered in the free exercise of it. He was interested in his people—as a rich and prosperous city man may be interested in his country cousins, with whom, however, he may never have had personal acquaintance. A circumstance occurred at this time which

aroused all his interest, quickened his love for his poor countrymen, and stirred all the latent patriotism and piety of his heart. On some account his brother Hanani had been to Jerusalem, and returning with some other Jews to the court in Babylon, Nehemiah asked them concerning the state of affairs there. This question and the answer seem to have wrought a revolution in the whole mind, heart, and character of Nehemiah, and changed the whole course of his hitherto easy and luxurious life at court.

I.—BAD NEWS FROM JERUSALEM.

The news which Hanani brought from Jerusalem was sad indeed, and was a revelation to Nehemiah. He had doubtless supposed that under the aged but still vigorous Ezra the restored people of the captivity were doing well enough, especially as he seems to have heard nothing to the contrary. It is often the case that poor and distressed relations do not intrude their afflictions and woes upon their more prosperous kinsmen, and sometimes also that distress and affliction are so habitual and common that it does not occur to the sufferers that there is anything unusual in their circumstances; and again, it is sometimes true that real piety, which accepts and bears with patience the estate in which God's providence leaves his people, does not readily spread the story of affliction abroad. Ezra had made no complaint to his prosperous countryman residing in the palace of the king, or else (which is more probable) he was too busy with his works of reformation and purification to think of doing such a thing, assuming most naturally that it would be time enough to make an appeal to Nehemiah, and other prosperous Jews still residing in Babylon, after they had done all they could to help themselves. The news from Jerusalem was bad indeed, and it covered two points.

1. **The affliction of the people.**—Between sixty and eighty years had passed since the first colony went up. At best but few of the more wealthy Jews had returned with the exiles, preferring to remain in the country (where most of them had been born, and where they had become wonted to the new conditions, which were not hard) to breaking up their homes and undertaking the hard and unthankful task of making new homes again, even in their own land. Self-interest and religious indifference were stronger with them than patriotism and piety. So it occurred that the returned exiles were for the most part the poorest Jews. Their resources had been taxed to the utmost to rebuild the Temple and to recover their homes.

The times had not been prosperous either, and upon the whole they had fallen into a very poor and low state indeed. They were in "great affliction and reproach." Their affliction consisted, first, of the real poverty and distress which they were suffering, as well as the rudeness and the hostility of the surrounding people, who always hated the Jews, and most likely lost no opportunity of adding to their distress either by oppression or even by actual violence. The spirit which Nehemiah afterward encountered among these people is ample proof of their evil attitude toward these Jewish colonists. Their reproach consisted of their low state, and the taunts and jeers with which they were everywhere greeted by their more prosperous neighbors, especially by the Samaritans, as also by the conduct of Sanballat and Tobiah the Ammonite. (ii, 10; iv, 1-4; vi, 1, 2.) An unwall'd city in those days was regarded as no city at all, and was sad proof of poverty and feebleness. On this account they were being constantly taunted and insulted. Out here in India I am daily witnessing the same state of things. The native Christians are "in great affliction and reproach." For the most part they are of low caste, poor, and without influence among the ruling classes, either native or European. They are being constantly mocked by their rich and more prosperous neighbors, and by none more cruelly than by the unconverted Europeans, who seem to take especial delight in reproaching and slandering them on all occasions. Even among many who call themselves Christians I find this spirit. It is rarely that I hear a good word for native Christians from the European Christian(?) community. Their "feebleness and poverty" seem to be an offense which their prosperity cannot condone or justify. This condition of things must have struck Hanani all the more because he himself was a prosperous man in Babylon, and to him the affliction of the children of the captivity may have seemed even worse than it really was.

2. The condition of Jerusalem.—"The wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned." When Nebuchadnezzar more than a hundred and fifty years before had sacked the city and carried away the people captive, he left it a heap of ruins. "He burnt the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire." "And all the army of the Chaldeans, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down all the walls of Jerusalem." (II. Kings xxv, 9, 10; Is. lxiv, 10, 11; Jer. lii, 14.) There is no evidence that these walls were ever rebuilt. The Samaritan accusation (Ezra iv, 12) was evidently a false one, based upon what they supposed

was the purpose of the Jews, seeing they had begun to rebuild the Temple. This wretched and defenseless condition of the Jews at Jerusalem greatly shocked Hanani, and the fact of it struck Nehemiah with sorrow and shame. It could never be said that the people were truly restored so long as Jerusalem was still this heap of ruins. Even with the Temple rebuilt and many private houses restored, the city itself was still a desolation without walls. These broken walls, the burnt and charred remains of the once powerful and strong gates, were a standing reproach, especially in a country and at a time when every city and every small town was walled and defended by towers and battlements. These broken walls showed all the more the wretched condition of the Jews since the rebuilding of the Temple. What security had they against any attack from their enemies? Already war with Egypt was threatening, and if that event took place the whole country would be in a blaze, and the Temple itself, instead of affording protection, would court attack, in order that its rich belongings might once more become a prey. This sad condition of Jerusalem and of the people dwelling in it may be taken as an allegory of a backslidden condition of the Church of Christ in any period. We may even find reason to compare the condition of the Church to-day in some respects with that of Jerusalem at this time. The coldness, indifference, sectarian divisions, the strifes, errors, and destructive work of so-called "higher criticisms," the apostasies in doctrine, and the worse apostasies in life, and the general disposition to conform the Church and Christian life to the world and its ways, are so many breaches in our walls of defense, through which the enemy may come in upon us, and which in any case are a reproach to us, and ought to grieve our hearts, as this sad news from Jerusalem stirred the heart of Nehemiah.

II.—NEHEMIAH'S SORROW.

The bad news brought by his brother and companions came as a sudden and dreadful shock to Nehemiah. He was suddenly aroused to a sense of his relation to the people of God. Here was he, living in a king's palace, occupying a position of honor and emolument, and the city of God and her people in affliction, reproach, and danger. He was awakened, as it were, out of sleep and from pleasant dreams by the cry of fire. His was a noble heart, and his the sorrow of a true child of God and a patriot. The distress of God's people became his distress, and their reproach his reproach. For

him there was no more peace and comfort. With all the passion and abandonment of a true Oriental he gave himself up for a time to grief. He "sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven." In this brief pathetic sentence we get a glimpse of the deep sorrow of Nehemiah, and the awakening of his piety and patriotism into intense activity.

1. He sat down and wept.—This is a revelation of the first awakening of his emotional nature. It is intensely descriptive of Orientals, as well as of his own fiery and impetuous character. It reminds us of David, who said that "tears were his meat day and night." There are those who despise emotional people, and regard tears as a sign of weakness. But in this case, at least, it was the breaking up and the loosening of the bonds of a noble character, which were but preliminary to a mighty activity, placing Nehemiah in the front rank of his countrymen, and exalting him in after-years above even Ezra. Tears are either the sign of weakness or of strength, as the sequel shall prove. He did not sit down in despair, but prayed before the God of heaven, in deep sorrow, as Hezekiah went in before the Lord when Sennacherib came up against Jerusalem. (II. Kings xix, 1.) There is a time to weep before the Lord as well as a time to rejoice before him, and this was one of those times. All honor to the tears of Nehemiah.

2. He mourned.—This was a part of the movement of his heart. He mourned over the condition of his people, over the desolation of the Holy City, over the reproach upon the name of God, and over the sins of the people which had brought them to this low estate and which had not yet been put away.

3. He fasted.—Sometimes we read in Scripture of a national fast being proclaimed (Jonah iii, 7, 8); sometimes individuals gave themselves up to fasting before the Lord, as did Daniel (Dan. ix, 3; x, 3), Esther (Esther iv, 16), and Ezra (Ezra x, 6); so now Nehemiah "fasted before the Lord." It was the expression of his feelings that when Jerusalem was "a reproach" it was no time for him to be delighting and indulging himself in comfort and gratifying himself with court delicacies. So severe was his fast that months afterward (while it was still in progress) it caused the king to mark his altered appearance. (ii, 2.) His long fast was a sign of the genuineness of his sorrow.

4. He prayed.—His was a sorrow which did not suffer itself to be idle, or sink into mere depression or despair. He carried his grief and trouble to God. There is no place like the throne of grace for dealing with our troubles. So like to the action of Daniel was

the movement of Nehemiah, that we may conclude that he had read and deeply pondered the story of the sorrow, fasting, and prayer which that great prophet had left behind him. (Compare Dan. ix, x.) There is no more profitable line of study than that of the biography of good men. Not that we are artificially to imitate them, but that it opens up to us a knowledge of their secret way before God, which in our time of need and distress comes to our help. Prayer is the mightiest resource which the children of God have in time of need. If there was more prayer among us there would be less cause for tears, and more prosperity. It is better to "continue in prayer" before afflictions come, but it is certainly well to pray when they come. Prayer is both a means of prevention and a cure. If we have failed to use it as a preventive, let us not therefore fail to use it as a means toward relief.

III.—NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER.

The prayer of Nehemiah, as he opens it up to us, is so full that we can but hope to outline the characteristics without going into a full analysis of it. It is certainly given us as a model prayer, and marks out a pathway in which we may all do well to tread.

1. Adoration.—He begins his prayer by a reverent ascription of praise and adoration. He uses, in the first place, Daniel's favorite title, the "God of heaven," and then he calls him the "great and terrible God." Nehemiah was no doubt thinking of the greatness of God's mercies in the past history of the people, who had been the peculiar favorites of heaven, and the "terribleness of his judgments" which had fallen upon them through "his breach of covenant" on account of their sins. He alluded to both these sides of God's character when he adds, "that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments," and yet that "will in no case clear the guilty." (Ex. xxxiv, 7.) He refers to this feature of God's dealing further on in his prayer. It is a sign of reverence and adoration to recognize and bow to the righteous judgments of God, as well as to the multitude of his tender mercies.

2. Supplication.—Nehemiah next casts himself in supplication before God. "Let now thine ear be attentive and thine eyes open that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant." There is an "holy boldness" in this form of petition which, however, is fully warranted by all that God has revealed of himself concerning his gracious relations toward us. "The eyes of the Lord are over the

righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers." (I. Pet. iii, 12.) Nothing pleases God more than that his people should plead his own character and remind him of his promises when supplicating before him. We may without fear of presumption always call upon God to be true to himself, even in respect of granting mercy to the most unworthy and wrath-deserving of his people. This Nehemiah well knew from his study of the Scriptures, in which God has made known to us all his purpose of grace and all his method of procedure with sinners. In his supplication he manifested and displayed the most earnest and importunate desire. "Which I pray before thee now, day and night, for thy servants the children of Israel." He calls himself "thy servant," and he speaks of the children of Israel as "thy servants." In this also he was wise. God is pleased with us when we take our proper place, and lay claim to the kinship which he has granted us. The prodigal son was not wise in his humility when he said, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." His true position was that of a son, though a sinful, unworthy, and undeserving one. His father put him right on that point at once.

3. Confession.—Nehemiah, while pleading before God the fact that both he and the children of Israel were God's servants and the objects of his especial covenant regard, did not withhold from God the most comprehensive confession of their sins. "We have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments." Here he identifies himself with the people even of the past generation, on whose account all the wrath of God had come upon the nation. Here again he followed Daniel's noble example. (Dan. ix.) Perhaps he remembered the great promises of God made to the children of Israel at the time of the dedication of the first Temple. "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." (II. Chron. vii, 14.) Prayer for forgiveness and healing is never effectual without confession; Nehemiah well understood this, and nobly and sincerely fulfilled this condition.

4. Argument.—In his prayer and confession he mingles argument. He gathers together the pith of many of God's former declarations and promises, and brings them all before him. He reminds him that he had been faithful to his word in punishing and dispersing them for their sins, and urges that he must, to be true to himself, be equally faithful in recovering these scattered ones, even

from the uttermost parts of the earth. (Neh. i, 8, 9; Lev. xxvi, 33; Deut. iv, 27; xxviii, 64.) Thus did he take "words with him" and appear before the Lord, and argue his people's case. He added this utmost plea: "Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power and thy strong hand." As though he had said, "Thou art bound by that redemption now to save them. Thou canst not cast them off forever. They are thine, and thou must care for them and fulfill thy purposes." This is a fine example to us of intercession for others.

5. A special petition.—Nehemiah had already formed in his own mind a plan, which in order to carry out he must have the favor and help of his earthly master the king. He becomes very humble here, and urges that, though all unworthy, he "desires" to fear God's name. This is very pathetic. "Prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." That is, in the sight of Artaxerxes, on whom he must depend for the carrying out of his plan. Definiteness of purpose and a plan to serve the Lord ought to go along with every prayer, looking for help from the sanctuary. God is always ready to help those who are purposed to help themselves, and to give power to those who have a definite purpose and plan in the use of it.

VIII.

REBUILDING THE WALL.—Nehemiah iv, 9-21.

(9) Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. (10) And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall. (11) And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. (12) And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you. (13) Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows. (14) And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. (15) And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work. (16) And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. (17) They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. (18) For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me. (19) And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. (20) In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us. (21) So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.—Nehemiah iv, 9-21.

It would seem that at the time Nehemiah received the news of the distressful condition of the people and city of Jerusalem, he was either off duty (as personal cupbearer to the king), or that the king was absent from the palace. At any rate, some weeks, if not months, had elapsed, and when Nehemiah came again into the presence of the king, the king at once noticed the changed condition of his countenance, and how sad and wasted he was. He inquired the cause, surmising that it was "nothing else but sorrow of heart." Upon this Nehemiah told the king the cause of his distress. The king was sympathetic, and asked his servant what he would like

him to do in the matter. Instantly Nehemiah sent up one of those short ejaculatory prayers which are so peculiarly characteristic of the man. "So I prayed to the God of heaven" (ii, 4); not aloud of course, but in his heart. After this he boldly asks to be appointed governor of Jerusalem, and sent to the city with authority to rebuild the walls and governor's house, and restore its defenses. This request the king at once granted, and further gave him letters to the governors of the district, and to the keeper of the royal forests, desiring the latter to supply to Nehemiah all the timber he required, and appointing a guard of mounted soldiers to accompany him. In due course he arrived at Jerusalem, much to the indignation of Sanballat (ii, 10), who was grieved exceedingly that there had come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. Nehemiah went on into the city, but did not at once communicate with his own friends as to the nature of his visit or intentions. He first (secretly and at night) made two excursions around the broken walls of Jerusalem to see the extent of the damage, and no doubt to enable him better to lay his plans. In this he illustrated those characteristics of political sagacity for which he was distinguished. Having made his plans, he takes the rulers of Jerusalem into his confidence, tells them of the commission he has from the king, and all the favor which God had given him with that monarch, and proposes that they at once, each and all of them, begin the work of rebuilding the walls. When it was become known to Sanballat and Tobiah that they were about to rebuild the walls, they laughed them to scorn; but Nehemiah simply answered that the God of heaven would prosper them, and they would build, but that Sanballat and his Samaritan fellows had no lot or part in the matter. (ii, 20; Ezra iv, 3.) The third chapter is taken up with an account of how the work was planned. Nehemiah had separated the people by their families, and appointed each family to a certain portion of the wall, so that, as it were, every man builded over against his own house. Thus the work went on for a considerable time, until their enemies came upon them to hinder them.

I.—A TRIAL OF CRUEL MOCKING.

Among the trials of faith which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews mentions is this: "And others had trial of cruel mockings." Perhaps there is nothing harder to bear than the jeering mockery of people who hate you but who at the same time hold you in too great contempt to contend with you as an equal. Noah, no

doubt, suffered much from the mockery of the antediluvians, who regarded him as a crazy old fanatic while he preached and builded the ark. Lot "seemed to his sons-in-law" a foolish and weak man because he warned them to flee from the coming wrath of God. The mockery of the young men of Bethel was too great for the equanimity even of so good a man as Elisha. Even Jesus was made the target of mock homage and worship when he was in the hands of the soldiers, who clothed him with the old cast-off military coat, placed the crown of thorns on his brow and the reed in his hand as a scepter, and then bowed their knees and saluted him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Paul was the object of many sneers and mockeries because of his preaching "Jesus the crucified one" as the Son of God. Now Nehemiah and his brethren came in for a share of derision. They were feeble folk; they had fallen very low; and the idea of restoring Jerusalem to its ancient glory was indeed a most wild dream; and yet they were undertaking to rebuild that splendid wall which Nebuchadnezzar had thrown down. How would they accomplish it? What means had they? Where would they get workmen, and who would pay them? So reasoned Sanballat and Tobiah. Wroth as they were at the idea of their rebuilding the walls, they were yet persuaded that their efforts would end in miserable failure; and so they scoffed at them openly and in presence of the armies of Samaria. "What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they build the walls again out of the calcined rocks lying in heaps where they were burned with fire?" The idea was ridiculous. Then came on Tobiah and added his sneer. "Why," he said, "let them build. What can they do? Any wall these feeble Jews can build would be so poor and frail that a jackal running over it would knock it down."

1. The contempt of the world.—Nehemiah was neither the first nor the last of the servants of God who have had to bear the reproach of Christ and suffer the scorn of the world. From the time of Moses, "who esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt," until to-day, when the world is still sneering at the pretensions of Christianity, God's people have been under this kind of fire. If we look closely into the matter it is not difficult to see why the world sneers at us. (i) The task of bringing the world to the feet of Christ seems so utterly preposterous that it only provokes a contemptuous smile. I have seen the lips of men and women curl with derision out here (in India) when I have spoken of the hopeful prospects of the ultimate triumphs of Christianity. (ii) The comparative fewness of those who are engaged in the work.

It is quite true that, as compared with the vast unconverted multitude of the world, the company of Christians are few, and not only few but poor. There are "not many mighty, not many noble" among our ranks. The world boasts its great men, kings, governors, captains, great scientists, authors and influential editors, lawyers and medical men, many of whom are on the side of unbelief; and then they look over our camp, and finding, as they suppose, so few of this sort, they regard it as supremely foolish and utterly preposterous (not to say highly impertinent) that we should undertake to go on with the absurd idea that that Gospel of Christ will ultimately prevail. (iii) Then we must also take into account their ignorance of the secret resources of the Christian. Possibly Sanballat did not know how well fortified Nehemiah was with the king's warrant, how abundantly supplied he was with the grant of material from the king's forests; nor did he understand how powerful even a few people are when animated by a great enthusiasm, especially when they are united and well appointed, as was the force of Jews under Nehemiah. They also leave out of account entirely the "God of heaven." The Christian has a power which the world knows not of, and resources which are not displayed in the open markets of the world. Let the "heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing, and the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his Anointed. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh," for he has published his decree, and his only-begotten Son shall yet be placed in triumph upon the holy hill of Zion. (iv) The probable cause lying behind all others for the world-mockery of Christ and Christianity is their own alienation from God. They hate God and holiness, and do not wish to be brought under the power of the Gospel; especially they do not wish it to be true, and so they seek to persuade themselves that everything done in the name of Christ must be a failure.

2. How to meet the scoffs of the world.—It is very evident that Nehemiah felt keenly and bitterly the scoffs and jeers of Sanballat and his companions, and that the people were more or less affected by them—as indeed who would not be? Outwardly they were "a feeble folk," and their enterprise did seem rather a hopeless one, especially to unbelieving eyes; and no one enjoys being made to appear ridiculous to others. Yet did Nehemiah stick fast to his purpose and his work. To shield himself from the scoffs of the Samaritans and the others he had recourse to two things: (i) Prayer. "Hear, O our God: for we are despised: . . . for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders." (iv, 4, 5.)

We cannot commend the spirit of the whole prayer of Nehemiah, which reveals at once his piety and fierceness, and even vindictiveness. He prayed that his enemies might be destroyed, disgraced, and die unforgiven for their sins. Yet we must remember two things: The Gospel of Christ with its higher law of love had not been fully revealed at that time; and besides, Nehemiah did not so much pray this prayer of destruction upon his enemies for his own sake. They were smarting under the scorn of these men, it is true, but Nehemiah felt the indignity of it all more on God's account than on his own, for "God was despised" by these "enemies." Nevertheless, his refuge was the true one. Instead of hurling back their insults upon themselves, he poured out his heart to God. This also is our resource still,—prayer to God that our enemies may be disappointed in seeing the work prosper, and that they may be converted and changed into helpers instead of being hinderers. But in any event, "God is our refuge in every time of need." (ii) The next answer which Nehemiah made to his enemies was by patiently and bravely continuing the work. Nothing would tempt him to cease from the work. "So build we the wall: and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof." The breaches were all filled up, and the several parts (under the immediate supervision of the several parties of builders) were joined, and the whole wall had reached the half of its height. The result thus accomplished was due to the fact "that the people had a mind to the work." In this mind they were united in their purpose and in their plans; they were thoroughly in sympathy with each other; there were no jealousies and contentions among them; they implicitly trusted and obeyed their great leader; and all, no doubt, were filled with an enthusiasm from on high, and so wrought under the eyes of God. Whenever we shall be able to push forward the work of Christ in this world with the same union of purpose, plan, and sympathy, we shall be able utterly to despise the mockeries of the world. We, alas, ourselves too often give cause to the world to scorn us!

II.—A FORMIDABLE CONSPIRACY.

The rapid and substantial progress of the work upon the walls had turned the mockery of Sanballat and Tobiah against themselves. The work was actually going on; while they were jeering, the Jews were working, and before they were aware of it the wall was joined all around the city and half-way up. This made these enemies very wroth indeed, and showed them that they could not laugh down this

work of God. The world has found this out already, and is destined to find it out yet many more times. But these enemies were determined to hinder and stop this work of God. To this end Sanballat (who was governor of Samaria) gathered the neighboring petty princes and dependent satraps together, and made a conspiracy with them to make a strong force against the Jews, and by force to stop their work by actually slaying the people. (iv, 11.) They proposed that their attack should be in the nature of a surprise, rushing upon them unawares. Persecution has always followed ridicule in the history of the conflict of Christianity with the unbelief of the world. First the apostles were derided as "ignorant and unlearned men," and then they were beaten, imprisoned, and put to death. The spirit of the world has not changed, though it has lost its power largely to continue its persecutions; nevertheless we see this spirit at work in active persecution in some of the heathen countries. Here in India, when opportunity affords, in Africa, and notably in China, the Christians suffer not only ridicule, but are frequently attacked with physical violence in order to hinder their work.

1. Nehemiah's defense.—Against this new combination Nehemiah showed himself an alert and good general. The obscure twelfth verse seems to mean that certain Jews who lived in the neighborhood of the Samaritans, and who had become conversant with their hostile plans, had brought Nehemiah information. With this news he began to prepare for defense, and their defense consisted of two things: (i) Prayer. "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God." This was the old resource, and it is the one that never fails. It was the first resource. Would that we of this day could understand the supreme importance of prayer and the exceeding strength of it! Not only did Nehemiah pray, but he had infected all the people with his spirit of prayer. "We made our prayer." (ii) "And set a watch." We may count on supernatural aid in our defense, and to help us forward in our work, but this does not excuse us from using every means in our own power both to defend ourselves and to push forward the work. So Nehemiah prayed, *and set a watch!* That is, he appointed pickets to give warning of the approach of the enemy, that they might at any moment be ready to repel an attack. Our Saviour has bidden us both to watch and pray against the sudden assaults of temptation, which are liable to come upon us at any moment.

2. The work interrupted.—This new movement of the enemy for the time being interrupted the work. The withdrawal of so

many men from the walls to act as guards pickets, and soldiers left the workmen too weak-handed to go on; at least, so reported Judah to Nehemiah. Sometimes this is the case, but God's work is going on even when the workmen cease to build. It was a part of the work to defend that which had already been accomplished from the destroying hand of the enemy. I saw yesterday the walls of a great church in this city of Rangoon, upon which no work had been done for several years, and yet the work has not ceased, for the people have been in the meantime busy gathering money with which to complete it. Our changed circumstances often seem to hinder our work, when in fact they are hastening it, even when the direct work seems to come to a stop.

3. The defense and the exhortation.—Nehemiah showed himself a good general. There is often talent in God's people which is suddenly developed as circumstances may require. Who would have thought that this quiet cupbearer to the king of Persia would have been so sturdy and alert a workman and military commander? Nehemiah disposed of his extemporized army wisely. The lower places (that is, those places where the natural configuration of the ground made the wall seem lower and more likely exposed to attack) he manned with a guard, and on more conspicuous places he also set men armed with swords, spears, and bows. This was a device to show the enemy that they were fully prepared for their intended assault, and also to give notice that their secret conspiracy was known to them. It is a mistake to suppose that a Christian is not to use *all* the tactful resources of the mind to carry on God's work. Piety and good generalship go well together. Many a good enterprise has come to grief because God's people seemed to proceed on the assumption that religious and spiritual work did not require earthly care and talent to guide it. We often put good men on our boards and committees who have no tact or practical business qualification, assuming that because they are good they are wise. Let us take a leaf out of this Book of Nehemiah. See again how wise he was. He disposed his forces by families, as he had done in the work, and placed certain families together on the walls (or behind them) nearest to their own homes, where their wives and children were, and thus making them guards of their own households. They would fight better in proximity to their loved ones than elsewhere. Then he made them a stirring address, which was calculated to rouse both enthusiasm and courage. "Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

Here are stirring and sensible words. In the present conflict with modern unbelief, we need to take courage and remember our God, and fight. Yea, we too are fighting not only for ourselves, but for our children, and all that are dear to ourselves. If an age of infidelity were to supervene now upon us, alas for our sons and our daughters! Besides this our defense of Christianity against the attacks, secret and open, of all manner of enemies is a fight for all—for our enemies as well as for our friends.

4. The work resumed.—God had disappointed the devices of the crafty, so that their hands could not perform their enterprise. (Job v, 12.) Sanballat and his friends, finding that their plans were known, and that the Jews were prepared to fight as well as to work, decided not to make the assault, so nothing came of it. A bold and confident front to the enemy, having made our prayer to God, is often a victory gained. So “we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.” This was noble persistence in a good purpose. The momentary withdrawal from the work to fight the Lord’s battles had neither changed their purpose nor damped their ardor for the building of the wall. And they were all at it again with a will as soon as the present danger was past.

III.—PERMANENT PRECAUTIONS.

That which some emergency calls forth often becomes a permanent part of our work, and in this case it was so. It was true that the immediate assault of the enemy had been postponed; but he might again come upon them, or other foes might arise, so Nehemiah decided to arrange for a permanent guard. From that time he divided his force of personal servants into two, placing weapons in the hands of half of them and instruments of labor in the hands of the other half, while the voluntary workmen (the bearers of burdens and the actual masons) wrought with a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other—or, at least, each of these workmen had a sword girded at his side, so that he was ready in a moment to lay down the trowel and take up the sword. This is as it should be with us all, ready for work or for war as the case may require. God has need of soldiers as well as of workmen, and it is well that every workman should also study the arts of the soldier, and *vice versa*.

1. The sounding of the trumpet.—“And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.” Nehemiah was not confined to one place on the wall, but went the rounds, both overseeing the work and keeping a constant lookout for the enemy. The working parties were

scattered at long distances from each other, so that Nehemiah arranged that whenever the bugle sounded all parties should resort at once to that spot as being the place of danger and attack. What a grand suggestion of working together is this! When the bugle sounds either for an advance or to repel an attack from one part of God's Church, how inspiriting to see all other sections or sects going to the help of the party in danger, or moving forward! Thus should one part of the Church help the other in all forward movements, or to repel all attacks on the faith and to resist the enemy, however and wherever he may assault us.

2. Nehemiah continued his vigilance to the end.—The half of the people were detailed as soldiers and “kept watch from the morning light till the stars appeared.” The people were called in from the surrounding country to lodge in Jerusalem for safety (and for service, if required), as well as to act as a guard by night and to labor on the walls by day. Nehemiah was not behind the foremost in taking his share of the work and toil. “So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.” That is, they slept in their clothes.

IX.

READING THE LAW.—Nehemiah viii, 1-12.

(1) And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. (2) And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. (3) And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. (4) And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. (5) And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: (6) And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. (7) Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. (8) So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. (9) And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. (10) Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength. (11) So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. (12) And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.—Nehemiah viii, 1-12.

It is generally agreed among scholars that this chapter, together with the next two, was not written by Nehemiah himself, but by some unknown author, whose work, however, was approved by Nehemiah and placed by him in the book which bears his name, as covering an episode in the history of the Jews during the time in which he was governor of Jerusalem. The fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters give us an account of the finishing of the walls and the comple-

tion of the rest of the work (respecting the restoration of Jerusalem) to a successful state of order and defense, amidst all the difficulties caused by enemies from without and false friends and traitors from within. The fifth chapter especially gives us a graphic account of some stern and vigorous reforms carried out by Nehemiah in respect to the oppressive usury and grasping greed practiced by the rich upon the poor, and also the corruptions growing out of mixed marriages. In this work Nehemiah shows himself to have been a man with a tender conscience, a righteous spirit, and a strong and fearless hand. The people were brought to their better senses under his administration, and so far the honor of God and the rights of the people were restored in Jerusalem. He next (vii) revived the genealogical purity of the people, in order to secure them against mingling with the heathen, and forbade any man taking his place in the families of Israel unless he could show his regular descent. This may be taken as a practical lesson as to maintaining the purity of the Church, and limiting its membership to those who can show a spiritual character. Mixture in Israel was one of the chief causes of the overthrow, through corruption of the nation; and the mingling of unconverted members in the Church with those who have been truly born of the Spirit has ever been one of the fruitful causes of Church weakness and disaster. The Church of Christ should be composed only of those who have first been separated to God by the Spirit and then separated from the world by a thorough consecration. (Rom. xii, 1; II. Cor. vi, 14-18.) These conditions are too lightly regarded, even in our day, when, as we thankfully believe, the light of spiritual truth is shining more brightly in the Church than ever before.

I.—A GREAT AWAKENING.

It was the seventh month of the Jewish year (vii, 73), and the seventh month was the beginning of the civil year, and the feast of trumpets. It was also the anniversary of the restoration of the altar (Ezra iii, 1-3), and so a day both important and memorable. In fact, it was the Jewish New Year's day, the day of "Gospel proclamation" (Lev. xxiii, 24), a day of new beginnings, and of universal joy and gladness. The great gathering of the people out of their cities to Jerusalem was most appropriate. Another event of general interest had occurred. Ezra (who seems to have been away from Jerusalem during the building of the walls under Nehemiah) had returned. This is the first mention of his presence there since Nehemiah had come, and it is almost certain that he had but just

returned, and his coming was hailed with great gladness by the people, by whom he was greatly loved and respected. It is remarkable that this awakening among the people was a movement from among themselves. That is, they took the initiative in the matter of having the law read to them afresh by Ezra, and those who were associated with him, though no doubt Ezra's return and his well-known devotion to the law had suggested this movement to them. It was as though Mr. Moody had returned to Chicago after a long absence, and his presence in the city becoming known, the people would by common consent seek him out and request him to hold a series of revival meetings among them. It was both a natural and commendable movement on their part, and betokened only good to them and to the nation. Thus the people used to resort to Jesus and ask him to preach to them. What a great privilege it is to be such a teacher and preacher of the Word that the people themselves desire to be taught by him. Some preachers have difficulty in getting hearers to come to them, but Ezra was one of those whom the people so delighted to hear that they sought *him* out rather than waiting to be sought out by him.

1. The gathering of the people.—They had come up to the city for the New Year's feast—men with their wives, sons, and daughters, both old and young. Hearing of Ezra's presence in the city, they flocked to the water gate in a great mass, filling up all the street. The assembly was composed of men and women, and all "that could understand," by which is meant those of the children who were old enough to hear the Word with profit. It is always a glad sight to see children with their parents in the congregation where the Word of God is preached; and, on the other hand, it is a sure sign of the decay of spiritual life when the older children of the families are absent from the house of God. From the beginning God had ordained that the children should be instructed in the law. "Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children." "And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." (Deut. iv, 10; xi, 19.) Household or family instruction ought never to be overlooked or neglected, and the training that in our days is furnished by means of the Sunday-schools ought also to be valued by all parents and children; but even these two great methods of teaching children cannot and ought not to take the place entirely of the public preach-

ing of the Word of God in the congregation. Another remarkable feature of this great assembly was that the people were moved as by a common impulse. They "gathered themselves together as one man." This is always a sign of a spiritual awakening. A straggling congregation tells of low spiritual life, but a voluntary coming together of the whole people "as one man" is a sure sign that the Spirit of God is upon them. When the Holy Ghost was poured out on the day of Pentecost, "the multitude came together." If we want large congregations and spiritual results, let us pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and then will the people assemble and ask that the Word of God be preached to them.

2. The reading of the law.—"And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation." Here is a great preacher armed with his proper instrument for the doing of God's work. He did not come to give to the people the result of his own thoughts. He was not one of those modern preachers whose boast it is that they keep abreast with the age and "with modern thought." He was content to bring out God's Word and read it to the people. He had "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." (Ezra vii, 10.) He did not shut up the book and tell the people they were not able to understand it, but he opened it before them. The Bible is God's gift to the people, and not the peculiar property of the preachers. Neither was he one of those preachers who used the Bible as a mere book of texts. He was a devout and profound student of it; and not only so, but a *doer of it*. It is only when a preacher himself prepares his heart to seek the law of the Lord and himself keeps the law (that is, regulates his life by its precepts) that he is qualified to teach it to others. Such a preacher will never lack for hearers. The power of brilliant oratory is nothing as compared with a holy, humble, godly life, which sheds forth the aroma of God's Word in all that he does. We have here mention of a pulpit which had been erected for the better convenience of the preacher, enabling him to reach with his voice the vast concourse of people gathered about him. It was in Ezra's day that preaching first became, as it were, an institution, and perhaps it was his example which led in later times to the building of synagogues, for the convenience of the people in their own towns and cities. Nor was he content simply to take a text, but he read great portions of the Scriptures, history, prophecy, law, and Psalms. He read the book to them "from morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand." This was a long period of time to keep the people; but then the days of the "fifteen

minutes' sermon" had not come in, and the people did not grudge a little time to the hearing of the Word of God. Dr. Parks was once preaching in Boston, and because his sermon was long he omitted the reading of the Scriptures, saying that, owing to the length of his sermon, he would leave out the reading lessons from the Bible. At the close of the sermon a blunt old deacon said to him: "Dr. Parks, the next time you preach to us, if you find the time too short please omit some of your own stuff and let us have our portion of God's Word." This, no doubt, was good advice. I have often thought that perhaps a well-chosen selection of God's Word read to the congregation for the space of an hour would prove more interesting to them and no doubt more profitable than our own sermons. It might be worth while to try. Who will have the courage to make the experiment?

3. The attitude of the people.—Standing on the raised pulpit above the people, "Ezra opened the book." "And when he opened the book, all the people stood up." This was a mark of profound reverence for God's Word. It was not idolatry of the book (as some have suggested), but reverence for God. This was God's Word, and he was about to speak to them, and so they stood up in token of their reverence and readiness to hear; just as it is the common habit with many to rise when public prayer is being made. It is not probable that the people *stood* during all those six hours, but only that they arose when the book was first opened to them, as Eglon rose up when Ehud stood before him and said, "I have a message from God unto thee." (Judges iii, 20.) In the third verse we are told that "the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law." Literally "were unto the book of the law." Their attention was not given so much to the reader as it was to the book from which he read. It was God's words they wished to hear, and therefore their ears were fastened to the book. If people would follow this example and listen to God's words rather than to the preacher's, they would get more benefit from preaching.

4. Prayer with the reading.—We have first an account of the reading of the law, as that was the important event in this service, but the writer tells us in the sixth verse that Ezra offered a public prayer in connection with that service. Whether it was before or after the reading is not certain. Possibly having read the Scriptures he followed it with prayer, though it is more probable that the prayer was before. "And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God." For a sample of prayer, such, perhaps, as the one offered by Ezra, the student is referred to the long prayer recorded in the next chapter. It

was perhaps modeled on Ezra's prayer on this occasion. In this prayer God's goodness and mercy, his faithfulness and truth, his power and righteousness, were recognized, and all his faithful promises pleaded. The effect on the people was very great. They all responded at the close with a loud "Amen, Amen," and "lifted up their hands, and bowed their faces to the ground." This all indicated great emotion on the part of the people. The repetition of the "Amen" is a sure indication of the deep stirring of the feelings. For an illustration of this note the repetition of the words "Treason! Treason!" uttered by Athaliah; and the shouts of the excited and maddened people who cried out "Crucify him! Crucify him!" (II. Kings xi, 14; Luke xxiii, 21.) They cried out, "It is true! It is true!" That is, all that Ezra had said in his prayer was acknowledged to be true. No doubt he had made deep and touching confession of the sins of the people, touching their consciences, and bringing them low before God. The lifting up of their hands was a sign both of submission to God and of hope. (For the use of this expressive gesture, see Psalm cxxxiv, 2; I. Tim. ii, 8.) It means both confession, petition, and possibly a declaration that the people so lifting up their hands have put away their sins and now come before God with clean hands. "The hands which hang down" (Heb. xii, 12; Is. xxxv, 3) indicate despair or utter discouragement, so that the person whose hands hang idly at his sides has no more disposition or courage to pray. The bowing of their heads to the ground was the sign of profound reverence and worship. I have seen this act of worship many hundreds of times since I have been in these oriental countries, and it is very impressive even when done before an idol, much more so when the Musselman thus bows his head to the ground in his act of worship to the One God.

5. Expository preaching.—It seems that there was, besides the mere reading of the law, a translation of the Hebrew into the more common speech of the people, by means of which the people understood. There was no reading of the Word in an unknown tongue as the Romanist does. The object was that the people might hear it in their own tongue. The Word was slowly and distinctly read, and "the sense of it fairly given" and explained. Sometimes we have heard the Word of God so read in the churches that both the sense and meaning were confused, and the hearing of it was a task rather than a pleasure. Distinct utterance, clear emphasis, and simple explanation of God's Word is the most helpful kind of teaching. Oftentimes when the Scripture does not seem clear to me, I read it aloud to myself, speaking the words clearly and dis-

tinety. In this way I get a far better idea of the meaning than I can by merely reading it with my eyes. How helpful, therefore, must be the clear and distinct reading of the Word in the congregation, and how careful should every teacher and preacher be so to render God's Word that the people may get the sense of it, and understand the law.

6. The effect of the preaching of the Word upon the people.—"The people mourned and wept, when they heard the words of the law." No doubt Ezra had read to them not only the law in the stricter sense of that word, but he had read some or many of those passages in which God has plainly set forth what will be the consequences of sin; and also the record of the sins of the people as recorded in the prophets, and the story of their dispersion and distress, from which but a remnant were now emerging, and that in much poverty and trouble. In this reading they saw themselves possibly repeating the offenses of their fathers. When (in Josiah's reign) the long-lost law of God was found, and read in his hearing, he "rent his clothes"; for he said, "Great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us." (II. Kings xxii, 11, 13.) The reading of the law now by Ezra and his associates produced some such effect upon these people. In the light of that law they saw how they had contracted guilt, how they had forfeited good and incurred evil; and their hearts were smitten with fear and their consciences aroused because of sin. The Word of God had come like a hammer and broken their hearts; like a fire and melted them; and like a sword it had pierced their souls; and in true oriental fashion they gave themselves up to passionate expression of their grief and contrition. No doubt also in the course of the reading Ezra had shown them how rich the mercy of God was, and that he was ever ready to forgive. This great love also touched their hearts, and caused them the more to mourn their deep ingratitude as well as their sins.

II.—THE JOY OF THE LORD.

After the first reading of the words of Ezra and Nehemiah (the civil and ecclesiastical leaders of the people), we are a little surprised when they bade them "mourn not, nor weep." Was it not good and proper that they should weep and mourn because of their sins? Yes, certainly; but there is a time to weep, and there is a time to rejoice. The day upon which all this occurred was a specially holy day, a

day in which forgiveness was peculiarly preached. They had sinned, but now the Gospel was proclaimed, and they ought not to turn a day of gladness into one of fruitless sorrow. It is meet that we should weep and mourn over our sins, but not to the neglect of the frank and hearty acceptance of the forgiveness of them. Sometimes people make a merit of what they call "repentance," and go on mourning when they should accept forgiveness and begin to rejoice. God has appointed to them that truly mourn in Zion "beauty for ashes, and the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." (Is. lxi, 3.) It is as much our duty to believe in the forgiveness of God as in the wrath of God. If we truly repent, God promises to forgive our sins. Let us, then, accept the comfort that is appointed "them that mourn," and not continue in *unbelieving repentance*.

1. Keeping the feast.—There was a duty in hand for them to do. The joyful feast was to be kept. This was God's appointment. Let them therefore testify the genuineness of their repentance by the faithfulness with which they enter into this holy feast. We can serve God with gladness as well as with tears. "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared." Let them celebrate God's goodness to them and not forget the poor in the midst of their own feasting. A real Christian can never enter into thanksgiving without desiring to share God's bounty with those who have been less favored. It was an old ordinance of God that in all these feasts the poor should be specially and liberally provided for. (Deut. xv, 7-11; xvi, 11-15.) This feature of the feast was perpetuated in later years after the great deliverance wrought among the Jews in the days of Esther. (Esther ix, 19, 22.) There is yet a higher lesson. If we have received from the Lord the greatest of all blessings, namely, the salvation of our souls, let us rejoice indeed in this feast of fat things, but let us earnestly seek to communicate a similar blessing to those who have not as yet received it. To give the bread of life to a sinner is better than to give him all the fat of the land and all its sweets.

2. The joy of the Lord is your strength.—The leaders of the people reminded them that their strength was not in mourning or in repentance, but in the "joy of the Lord." Men are weak when they are depressed with sorrow, but they are strong when they are filled with joy. What is this joy of the Lord which is strength to us? It is joy "in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation." (Rom. v, 11; Ps. cxlix, 2; Is. xii, 2, 3; xxxv, 1; lxi, 10; Joel ii, 23; II. Cor. viii, 2; Phil. iv, 4.)

We are not, therefore, to abide in sorrow nor be perpetually in grief over our sins, since God has forgiven them; but are to testify to his grace by "rejoicing in God our salvation," and thus showing to others how great a gladness a Christian has. The mirthfulness which is here enjoined is not worldly mirthfulness but Christian happiness. The world needs many happy Christians, who shall be able to testify to those who only have the empty mirth of the passing pleasures of sin and this world how much better it is to rejoice in God than in "pleasure." Those are not the most helpful Christians nor the truest exponents of God's salvation who go about with sad countenances and long faces, as though there was nothing but gloom in the kingdom of God.

3. "They understood the words that were declared unto them."—This is given as a reason why they finally gave themselves up to gladness. At first they had understood that their sins had brought upon them the wrath of God, but not that God was also full of mercy and that he was ready to forgive them and did so abundantly. Only last night I was talking to a fine young soldier of the Queen of England here in Rangoon. He had come forward to the penitent form. His grief was very great because of his sins, but when I showed him the truth of God's forgiveness he burst out into happy laughter and his face shone again with a new joy. That was when he understood and accepted the Gospel.

X.

KEEPING THE SABBATH.—Nehemiah xiii, 15-22.

(15) In those days saw I in Judah some treading winepresses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. (16) There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. (17) Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day? (18) Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath. (19) And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day. (20) So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. (21) Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath. (22) And I commanded the Levites, that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.—Nehemiah xiii, 15-22.

There can be no doubt of the authorship of this chapter. It is as plainly recognizable as the work of Nehemiah as is the face of an old familiar friend in the midst of a crowd of strangers. Here we have our fiery, impetuous, bold, brave, pious, impartial governor back again from the capital of Artaxerxes, taking up his work in Jerusalem with a strong hand; putting down abuses, contending with nobles, cleansing the Temple, bundling out intruders, threatening to arrest offenders, reviling apostates and even lifting his hand and smiting some outrageous sinners, and chasing a particular offender from his presence. (xiii, 11, 15, 17, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28.) Withal we see him tender-hearted toward God, with a grieved spirit, shooting forth his ejaculatory prayers as though in everything he did he felt both his need and dependence upon God, and was sensitive

as to his position as God's servant, and conscious of his own sins and need of mercy. (vs. 14, 22, 29.) It is impossible not to admire and love this energetic, able, and devoted hero-governor of Jerusalem. Nor do we wonder that his nation, after long years, continued to reverence, and almost to worship, his memory. Nehemiah was probably the most efficient and effective reformer that ever rose in Judea. He finished as he began, never slacking his hand, and never lapsing into ease and contentment. He was always jealous of the honor of God, always hated sin, yet loved the sinful people intensely, and never thought of himself except in respect of his work for God and for others. He corrected effectually the two great abuses which he found in Jerusalem when he took charge of the city's affairs, which threatened both the material and spiritual prosperity of the people. These two abuses were the mixed marriages and the desecration of the Sabbath. He affords throughout a good model both for civil and religious rulers in his spirit and methods.

After ruling in Jerusalem as governor for twelve years, he had occasion to return to Babylon, probably to consult Artaxerxes the king on some matters, and was detained at the court for some time, when he again obtained leave to return to Jerusalem and resume his work there. (v. 6.) It was in this interval of absence that the abuses to which we have referred sprung up, and, shame be it to say, they arose not so much among the common people as by the instigation and connivance of the high-priest and the nobles. (vs. 4, 11, 17, 28.) In his absence Eliashib (the high-priest then) had made alliance with Tobiah, one of Nehemiah's old enemies, and had even vacated one of the great chambers of the Temple and given it to him for a residence, also, in the meantime, neglecting to care for the Levites, so that they were compelled to forsake the Temple and resort to the country, turning agriculturists in order to earn for themselves a living. More than that, he had married one of his grandsons to the daughter of Sanballat the Horonite (v. 28), thus not only re-introducing the hateful mixed marriages into Jerusalem, but leading the way to the general prevalence of that practice among the people. In the meantime all manner of work and traffic on the Sabbath-day was allowed and encouraged, not only by the children of Judah themselves, but by the strangers who dwelt in the city, and by merchants from without the city, who were encouraged to bring in their merchandise and trade on the holy day, so that Jerusalem was one great busy bazaar on the day which God had sanctified as a day of rest and worship.

I.—THE SABBATH PROFANED.

The first thing that attracted the attention of Nehemiah on his return to Jerusalem was the labor going on in the outlying fields on the Sabbath. "In those days saw I in Judah some treading the winepress on the Sabbath," etc. (v. 15.) Then, entering the city, he found all manner of trade and traffic going on. This was clearly a most flagrant violation of God's law, and aroused his indignation. Before noting in particular the doings of Nehemiah in these circumstances, it may be well for us to take a brief review of the relation of the Sabbath of the Lord to the whole economy of the Jewish people. The Sabbath is the first and oldest ceremonial institution established on the earth. It was sanctified from the very birth of the human race. (Gen. ii, 2, 3.) God finished his creation on the sixth day, and on the seventh he rested and "sanctified it, because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." Thus did God from the beginning set apart and bless this holy day. This alone ought to have made it holy for all his people in all time. There is every reason to believe that it was known and observed by such as kept the knowledge of God from the days of Adam until the days of Moses, through the whole earth. It was revived and became the sign of the new creation or redemption in connection with the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt. (Deut. v, 13, 14.) While on their journey through the wilderness its strict observance was commanded in connection with the gathering of the manna. On the sixth day they were commanded to gather a double portion, that there need be no necessity for labor on the seventh day. (Ex. xvi, 23.) It was finally incorporated in the law which God gave to Moses on Sinai. (Ex. xx, 8; Deut. v, 13.) Thereafter it became one of the most solemn of God's ordinances. It stood, a sign, attesting the obedience and faithfulness of the people to God as the tree of knowledge of good and evil had stood in the beginning to Adam and Eve. (Ex. xxxi, 13.) To observe the Sabbath and keep it faithfully was a guarantee of good faith, and contained the promise of all blessing; to violate and desecrate it was a sign of godlessness, and brought down upon the offender the curse of God. Its violation was punishable with death. (Ex. xxxi, 15; Num. xv, 35.) Jesus declared that this holy day of rest was "made for man." (Mark ii, 27.) It was continued with the modification of its symbolic teaching by the early Christians on the Lord's day, or the "day of resurrection." (Acts

xx, 7; I. Cor. xvi, 2; Rev. i, 10.) In respect of the change of the day from the seventh to the first under the Christian dispensation, while there is no expressly written word concerning it, it is generally understood to signify that our Lord by his death had finished the work of redemption (which was the crowning work of creation), thus bringing in, as it were, the new creation of God; and as his resurrection was the completion of the redemption work wherein God took delight, it became the true day of rest. In the Epistle to the Hebrews this spiritual significance of the Sabbath and the relation of believers to it is fully set forth. The rest of creation is there contrasted with the rest of redemption, and as of old the Jews were required to enter into the day of creation rest, so now the Christian is required to enter into the redemption rest. "And God did rest the seventh day from all his works." (Heb. iv, 4.) But another day is pointed to by David: "Again he limiteth a certain day," saying, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." "There remaineth therefore a rest" (Sabbath) "to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest hath ceased from his own work as God did from his." That is, we find rest by faith in the finished work of Christ, as God found rest in the finishing of creation. "For we which have believed do enter into rest." The Christian Sabbath, then, is connected with the finished work of Christ, and not with the finishing of creation; therefore, as the resurrection of Jesus marked the finishing of his great redemptive work, by which he brought in the new creation (II. Cor. v, 17), his resurrection day (that is, the first day of the week) is our Sabbath-day. For among the "old things which have passed away" by the coming of Jesus is the Jewish Sabbath, and among the "all things which have become new" is the Christian's Sabbath, or Lord's day. (Heb. iv, 1-11.) (For those who may wish to study the matter further, the following references may be helpful: Gen. ii, 2, 3; Ex. xii, 16; xx, 8, 11; xxxi, 13; xxxv, 3; Lev. xix, 3, 30; xxvi, 2; Num. xv, 32, 36; Deut. v, 12, 15; Neh. ix, 14; x, 31; xiii, 15; Is. lvi, 2, 6; lviii, 13, 14; Jer. xvii, 24, 27; Ezek. xx, 12; xxii, 8; Amos viii, 5; Matt. xii, 1; Mark i, 21; ii, 24; Luke iv, 16; John v, 9, 18; vii, 22, 23; xx, 1, 19; Acts xiii, 44; xvi, 13; xvii, 2; xviii, 4; xx, 7; Rev. i, 10; and many others which may be turned up with the aid of a reference Bible or a concordance.)

1. Details of the desecration.—The first specification in Nehemiah's indictment was that he saw men "in Judah, some treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and some bringing in sheaves and lading asses, as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens,

which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath-day." (v. 15.) In fact, the desecration had gone so far that all the ordinary labor of the field and all the details of merchandise were carried on on the Sabbath just as on other days. It could not be urged that bringing in produce on the Sabbath-day and selling it as victuals were works of necessity, for these victuals included wine, grapes, and figs, as well as corn, which were the luxuries of the table, and not necessities. In other words, the Sabbath was completely ignored by the country people in continuing their farm labor and traffic, and by the city people in buying and trading with the vendors of country produce. This of course necessitated the opening of the bazaars, where these things brought in from the country were first bought from the farmers and then sold to the citizens. God and his day were entirely forgotten, and man and his greed of gain and gratification of appetite were uppermost. It is not surprising to learn that in the meantime the service of the Temple was neglected and its courts empty of worshipers. I have here, in this heathen country, seen this state of affairs every Sabbath-day since I have been in India. All farm work and all the business of the cities go on just the same as on any other day. Work on buildings both public and private is continued. The government of India participates in this desecration as well as the heathen natives of the city. Private (European) companies in trade and manufacture take this holy day for making all their repairs and "doing up," as they say, their "odd jobs." The tendency in our own country to introduce what is called the European Sabbath will soon, unless checked, bring in upon us not a European Sabbath, but a state of heathenism differing from that out here only in name. Besides the desecration of the day by the Jews themselves, there "dwelt men of Tyre, also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem." Nehemiah had no objection to foreigners dwelling in the city and carrying on their legitimate trade. This had been a custom permitted from of old and warranted by the permission of God; but it was expected and commanded that they must conform to the laws of the covenant people. It is probable that it was these Tyrian traders in the city who first set the example of Sabbath-breaking by continuing their trade, and since the nobles did not forbid them, the children of Judah, to "hold their own," began also to trade. The bringing in of fish involved fishing on the Sabbath, and the transportation of the fish from the sea and the lake to the city. We know something of this process at home. Foreigners who have come to dwell with us and partake of

the benefits of our country and government have brought with them their "European habits," and have not observed the Sabbath as our fathers did, and as all true Christians desire to do now. A false tolerance has allowed them, little by little, to infract the quiet and the rest of the Lord's day; and then their customs have corrupted the less scrupulous among ourselves, and it looks as though our Sabbath-day was to be entirely desecrated. Our municipal governors have taken the bribe and consented to the opening of places of music, and such places of business as the Sabbath-breakers desire to traffic with; public conveyances to all manner of places of pleasure are being driven to accommodate the Sabbath-breakers; drinking saloons are being opened, and even now the rulers of the cities are pleading that such things are necessary for the well-being of the people. Personal freedom is pleaded against the law of God and the early institutions of our free country, and evil is upon us beyond what we think. A third count was that traders from without came with their wares and encamped just outside the city walls, and a busy traffic went on through the gates of the city. All this Nehemiah saw, and his righteous soul was vexed and his indignation was kindled at the sight. It was well for Jerusalem that Nehemiah had returned (perhaps unexpectedly to the rulers and the people) to set God's house and God's city in order again.

2. Measures of reform.—Nehemiah was as quick to undertake the correction of this flagrant evil as he was to perceive it. He lost no time, and did not mince his words or allow the sword of his magisterial authority to remain rusting in the scabbard. He first fell upon the nobles, as they were the chief offenders. The city was in their charge. They were responsible both for its good government and for the sacred observance of the laws of the sanctuary and the day of rest. A little while before (x, 30, 31) they had entered into a solemn covenant not to give their daughters in marriage to strangers, and to keep sacred the Sabbath, especially in respect of all manner of merchandise and traffic on the holy day. Without their connivance and encouragement the present state of things could not have come to pass. It was probably their desire for "fresh fish" and "fresh fruit" for their tables which led to the mischief. They were double offenders, first in gratifying their own indulgences at the expense of the holy day, and then in winking at the breaking of the day by the people. Nehemiah was not tender with them. He summoned them into his presence and broke out upon them: "What evil thing is this that *ye* do, and profane the Sabbath-day?" They did not trade and lade asses, but they would send their serv-

ants to buy. They sat still and allowed the evil to go on without rebuke. They were in authority, and therefore Nehemiah held them responsible for the sins of the people. He struck at the root of the evil. It was no use remonstrating with the people when the nobles were guilty. It is "spiritual wickedness in high places" that always threatens the peace and welfare of the community. These are true proverbs: "Like rulers like people"; "Like priests like people." He remonstrates with them and points out the evil that they are doing, and the calamities which they are inviting upon the city and the nation. "Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath." It was through this open door of the profanation of the Sabbath that all the evil of old had come upon the land and Jerusalem. He probably alluded to what Jeremiah had said to the people before the captivity: "And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto me, saith the Lord, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath-day, but hallow the Sabbath-day, to do no work therein," then shall all manner of blessing and prosperity be yours. "But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the Sabbath-day, . . . then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched." (Jer. xvii, 24, 27.) This prophecy of evil was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar took the city and burned it to the ground and carried away the people captive to Babylon. Now had they scarcely been restored to their city and country, their Temple rebuilt and the walls and palaces repaired and restored, yet the nobles and the people were committing the same sins as their fathers did, and inviting "more wrath." It is not a wonder that this pious and God-fearing, Scripture-reading and loving governor was indignant, and "did well to be angry." "They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them." If any think Nehemiah too severe in his contention with the wicked, let them remember that it is a Christian injunction to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to reprove them." (Prov. xxviii, 4; Eph. v, 11.) It is not enough to withdraw from evil and evil-doers, but we must rebuke and reprove them. This is especially true of rulers who are set by God as a defense of the right and a terror to evil-doers. Nehemiah next adopted measures for the protection of the day by means of guarding the gates. He ordained that the gates should be closed a little before sunset on Friday evening and not opened again until after the Sabbath was over. This prevented the traders, whether

Jews or foreigners, from entering the city on the holy day. There could be no foreign traffic, at least, if this measure was carried out. The "foot gate" (or small wicket) was allowed to be open to enable persons to pass in and out; but to prevent merchants from bringing in their packs on their backs he set guards there to watch that the order be not infraacted. This compelled the merchants to camp outside the gates, and a considerable traffic was still carried on that way. This also coming to the knowledge of Nehemiah, he went out to them and spoke to them in a way that they could not fail to understand. Once or twice they had thus allured the people out to trade with them. Nehemiah went out and rated them soundly and said to them plainly: "Why lodge ye about the wall? If ye do so again, I will lay hands on you." That is, I will have you arrested. This drastic measure succeeded, and the merchants came no more. Nehemiah was one of those magistrates who "bore not the sword in vain, but was a terror to the evil-doers." Happy is the country which has such rulers, just and generous, the rewarder of those who do well and a terror to the wicked. Having thus set the city in order, he commanded the Levites who had fled from Jerusalem to return and cleanse themselves, and he set some of them to keep the gates of the city, and to see that there was no more violation of the Sabbath by the bringing in of burdens through them on the Sabbath.

II.—THE PRAYER OF NEHEMIAH.

It must not be supposed that Nehemiah carried out his reforms, did his great work, and executed the office of governor in the mere energy of the flesh. He was a devout man and so habituated to prayer that at all times and seasons he would pour out his heart to God in short ejaculations, covering his present necessity. In this chapter he records three such prayers, interspersed at those critical moments when he was assaulted with fits of depression, when he felt the immediate need of God's help, or was desirous of referring his measures for reform to God for approval. He begins his prayer by a uniform formula, "Remember me, O my God." At verse fourteen he prays that his good deeds might not be wiped out, by which I suppose he means simply that all his labor and toil for the city might not be frustrated and brought to naught by these evil-doers. At verse twenty-nine he prays that the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites might be preserved. This seems to be a prayer for the preservation of these holy offices intact

and in holiness, and expresses his strong desire for the preservation and maintenance of the purity of religion among these officers and the people. At verse twenty-two, which falls within the limits of our study to-day, he prays for the divine approval of the measures he had taken to purify the city from the Sabbath desecration which it had suffered. But he also now prays for himself. The sins of the people had made him sensitive to his own, and while dealing harshly with the evil-doers around him, he seems to recognize that he needs to be dealt with in mercy himself. "Remember me, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy." He does not plead his good works or all his zeal in the service of God and the people, but with true evangelical feeling he casts himself upon the greatness of God's mercy. Perhaps also in this prayer he was thinking of the people. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him: and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." (Is. lv, 7.)

XI.

ESTHER BEFORE THE KING.—Esther iv, 10-17; v, 1-3.

(10) Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai; (11) All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days. (12) And they told to Mordecai Esther's words. (13) Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. (14) For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (15) Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, (16) Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. (17) So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him. (1) Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house. (2) And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre. (3) Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom.—Esther iv, 10-17; v, 1-3.

Chronologically the book of Esther follows rightly after Nehemiah, for the story which it records was in the reign of Ahasuerus, or Xerxes, the successor of Artaxerxes, the friend of Nehemiah and of the Jews. It is pretty well agreed among scholars that the Ahasuerus of Esther was the Xerxes of Persia, who became famous in connection with his great expedition against Greece, and his humiliating defeat. The more this book has been subject to the critical examination of scholars the more does its claim to a place in the canon of Scripture seem justified. By whom it was written is unknown. Certainly not by Ezra, as some have supposed, and equally certainly not by Mordecai, the noble Jew whose instrumen-

tality in the saving of his nation these brief chapters so prominently record. It must have been written by some Jew of the dispersion who was at the same time intimately acquainted with all the ins and outs of the Persian court, for the minute and life-like touches discerned all through the book are proof of that; that the writer was a Jew is also evident from the strong bias of interest in behalf of the distressed and threatened people which runs all through the story. That it was written shortly after the events detailed is also equally certain, from internal evidence. It has all the marks and characteristics of a book written by one who was himself cognizant of the facts recorded. It is too "living" to be merely an old story or tradition.

The peculiarities of the book are very marked. The first one is that throughout its pages there is not only no mention of the name of God, but, except in one case, not even a reference to him. The book is entirely secular in its structure, and records events in a manner that is entirely independent of any other forces or powers beyond the earth and man. And yet the wonder is that no one can read this book without the feeling that God is everywhere present in it, and that the principal characters, both Mordecai and Esther, were moved by his fear and strengthened by his presence. Dean Stanley remarks in his lectures on the Jewish Church: "It is expedient for us that we should have one book which omits the name of God altogether, to prevent us from attaching to the mere name a reverence which belongs only to the reality." The whole story is a grand lesson on the presence of God in history, especially in connection with his providential care for his own chosen people in this world. It is well for us to remember that God is in all history, whether the historian mentions his name or not. Perhaps this peculiarity of the Book of Esther may serve to help us remember this when reading secular history. Not only is not the name of God mentioned, but there is in the whole no direct religious teaching, and neither any reference to or record of prayer. Esther and Mordecai and the Jews are said to have fasted, but it is not said that they prayed, though no doubt they did. There is present a loftiness of religious character in both Mordecai and Esther, but no reference to the secret source of their faith, sublime heroism, and trust. Neither is Jerusalem nor Palestine mentioned, nor even alluded to, nor any reference made to Israel's past history or to the present condition of the Jews either in Palestine or in Babylon. The Jews who were the particular objects of the hatred of Haman were those exiled Jews who had chosen not to return to their own land either under the

leadership of Ezra or Nehemiah. Good people are always more or less exposed to danger, but they are never in such danger as when they are voluntary residents in Babylon or are willfully living or doing business on the world's ground.

The book itself is a continuous narrative without any regularity of breaks, and it is somewhat difficult to give any analysis of the book by chapters. It begins with an account of a great feast given by the king, and his whimsical command that the queen should appear before the king and his guests unveiled, that he might display her beauty. To this the queen refused to submit, as being disgraceful. Her refusal led to divorce and banishment from the court. Then we have the account of the search for some one to take Vashti's place, and the final choice of Esther, a beautiful young Jewess, the niece of Mordecai. Mordecai was an officer of the king's court, and he somehow discovered a plot against the king's life, revealing it in time to save the king. Haman, the prime-minister of the king, hated Mordecai because the latter refused to pay him the deference he thought due to him. As a matter of revenge he succeeded in securing a decree that all the Jews throughout the empire should be put to death. The time for carrying out the decree was decided by lot, and fell on a date nearly a year later. In the meantime the king had discovered that nothing had ever been done to reward Mordecai for revealing the plot against his life. He determined to reward him royally, and to this end (without mentioning who was in his mind) he asked Haman what he should do to the man whom the king desired to honor. The pride and conceit of Haman suggested to himself that he was the man whom the king had in mind, and he planned the great honor which to his utter mortification he had to bestow upon Mordecai. The turn thus in the fortunes of Haman culminated in himself being hanged on his own gallows. The Jews, in the meantime, through the favor granted to Esther, are permitted to defend themselves against their enemies, which they do successfully, and so are delivered. This is the outline of the story of the book, omitting the particular incident which is the subject of our study.

I.—ESTHER'S HESITATION.

When Esther had heard from Mordecai of the decree of Ahasuerus (of which she had been ignorant), and that the only hope of their deliverance lay in her going into the presence of the king and making supplication to him for her people, she naturally shrank from

undertaking this perilous adventure, for reasons which she states in the answer she sends to Mordecai. Esther was full of sorrow and sympathy for her threatened people, even though possibly it had not occurred to her that she also was threatened with the rest. It was a great crisis in her life, and she found herself in a great strait. She wanted to help her people, but she could not find the best way. The plan suggested by Mordecai seemed both impracticable and hopeless. Not only was there personal danger to herself in it, but if she should fail to win the royal favor then there would be no possibility for her to help her doomed people. Every position brings its responsibility, and every life has its crises. Esther's position was a high one, but it did not excuse or deliver her from great responsibility. Like Moses she was in the king's palace, and like him she had come into a strait, and must cast in her lot with and for God's people, "not counting her life dear to herself." She was not unwilling to do her part, but the difficulties in the way were not only great but almost insuperable, and she shrunk from facing them. This was no sign of cowardice, but only that natural hesitation which even the bravest and most willing may experience; and she sent word back to Mordecai, stating the difficulties in her way.

1. The one law.—It was well known all over the provinces, that "whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king in the inner court, *uncalled*, shall be put to death." There was only one exception to this law, which we will note presently. This one law is to be understood as relating to every one, to the queen as well as to the meanest of the subjects. (Dan. ii, 9.) It was an absolute law, not to be waived on any account in favor of any one, except under the only circumstance when it was suspended. If we are allowed to read an allegory into this book we may contrast Esther's position with that of the sinner. Before God it is also true: there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; but then God has spoken no decree which makes approach to him perilous or punishable by death. It is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, but that living God in grace has bidden all men to turn to him in repentance and to seek his face. It was death for even the queen to go into the inner court of king Ahasuerus unbidden. It is death for the sinner, having been bidden, *not* to go into the presence of God, who only hath immortality and eternal life. Of old the high-priest only might go into the holiest of all; but now, since Jesus had died and rent the veil of the Temple from the top downward, it is not only the privilege of all men to

enter into the holiest of all, but it is death not to enter in there. "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith." (Heb. x, 22.)

2. The golden scepter.—The capricious king of Babylon, in making the decree concerning the unbidden entrance into his presence, reserved to himself the right to be "gracious to whom he would be gracious." So in case any one should come into his inner court, if it pleased him to extend the golden scepter (which he habitually carried in his hand) it meant suspension of the "one law" and a sign that the petitioner had found favor in his sight. This exercise of grace was purely arbitrary on his part. Esther had no means of knowing whether the king would receive her graciously or in anger. The chances were against her in the case. Now with God the case is different. His grace is never capricious, but it is "the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus is in fact that golden scepter which God has held out to the world, and by whom he offers eternal life to all. None need fear coming to God in the name of Christ, for he has bidden all to come; and to whomsoever comes he holds out this golden scepter. "Him that cometh to me," saith Christ, "I will in no wise cast out."

3. "I have not been called."—There was another most serious difficulty in the way of Esther. She now communicates it to Mordecai for the first time. The king's first ardor had cooled, and for a whole month she had not been called into his presence. If she were not in disfavor she certainly was not in high favor—not sufficiently so to warrant her in risking the cause of the Jews (which was lying tenderly on her heart) on the hazard of the king's whim. Now how different is the case of the sinner before God from the case of Esther and the Jews before Xerxes. She had not been called. Whereas God has called all sinners into his presence, not for condemnation, but for forgiveness and justification. When we draw nigh to God it may always be in confidence. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." (Is. lv, 7.) "Come unto me," saith Jesus, "all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It is true that death stares us in the face on account of our sin; but the way into the presence of the Lord of Life is open, and we are invited to enter.

It shall come to pass that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Rom. x, 13.)

II.—A BOLD FAITH.

Esther's message to Mordecai did not move him from his purpose that she should go into the king and make supplication for the doomed people. We cannot but believe that he saw all the difficulties of her position, and that he felt for her, too, for he loved her "as his own child," and we may therefore suppose better than his own life; but the case as it stood against the people of God was a desperate one, and it was necessary that all softness of feeling and weakness of action be put aside. Therefore he sent back a message to Esther which may seem at first sight a little heartless and unnecessarily stern.

1. **No refuge in selfishness.**—"Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews." It is not clear that Mordecai suspected Esther of selfishly drawing back from the dreadful task which had been imposed upon her; but at the same time he warned her that there would be no refuge for her in any selfish motive or scheme which she might propose. She might indeed perish if she went into the king; she certainly would if she did not. God has made us each "the keeper of our brethren," and, when there is any opportunity before us of helping them, he holds us responsible for their lives if we draw back from embracing it. "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small. If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it?" (Prov. xxiv, 10-12.) "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." (Matt. xvi, 25.) To withhold one's life in such a crisis from the people of God was to withhold it from God; and to give or even to risk life for the people of God who were in such peril was to give it for Christ's sake. To deny one's self, take up one's cross and follow Jesus, who gave himself for us and became obedient even unto death, is to be his disciple indeed. But this law holds also good in all the lesser crises of life. Selfishness is always certain in the end to bring disaster and loss upon us, while, on the other hand, unselfishness is certain to triumph in the end. It was pre-eminently so in the present example.

2. **Mordecai's great faith.**—Mordecai's second argument with Esther was based on his faith in God. Though he does not mention God in his message, he plainly implies his faith in him in respect of

the deliverance that would certainly come to the people. "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement" (a breathing time) "and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place." Mordecai had evidently some of God's great promises in his mind. "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" (Num. xxiii, 23; I. Sam. xii, 22; Is. liv, 17.) Moreover, he warned her that in the deliverance which he felt confident God would bring to the Jews, she and her father's house would perish if she failed in the duty which was manifestly laid upon her at this time. Mordecai would thrust his beloved niece into the very jaws of death, and did so with a strong hand, because he saw in her position the hand of God. He would not have her shirk her duty, even though it brought death to her—like the old Spartan mothers, who sent forth their sons to battle, with the injunction not to return without their shields, either bringing them back as victors or being brought back *on* them as evidence that they had died bravely for their country. Mordecai's love was more than a Spartan love, it was the love of a pious and patriotic Hebrew.

3. Mordecai's belief in Providence.—His third argument with Esther was one that showed his belief in the special providence of God in bringing her to the high place she was now occupying for just this very purpose. "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" This was uttered in a more tender and persuasive tone. He would have her see her high calling, recognize the hand of God in her present position, and be worthy of the honor, of her race, and of her present opportunity. In every place we occupy God has put us, and in that place, whether high or low, there is certain to come some great opportunity, which, if "we take it at the flood," will lead us on to great deeds of faith. The little Jewish maid who was a captive in the hands of her enemies did as great a deed of faith when she opened the way for Naaman the Syrian to go to Elisha to be cured of his leprosy as did Esther, the favorite queen of the Persian king, when at the risk of her life she saved her people from destruction; not so tragic, but as real an act of faith, for God regards our doings according to the opportunity and motive, and not according to the greatness of results or the conspicuous circumstances which surround them.

III.—ESTHER'S PIETY AND HEROISM.

When Esther received Mordecai's third message (just detailed), and had considered all his words, her indecision came to an end. In a moment she had taken up her purpose and made her plan.

1. **Her piety.**—She did not propose to run rashly to her task, but reverently. She sent word to Mordecai to gather the Jews together for a three days' fast, and added that she and her maidens would also observe a like fast. There is indeed no mention of God or prayer here, but both are implied. She would humble herself before God and seek his favor; no doubt, on the part of Mordecai and the Jews in the city, as well as on the part of Esther and her maidens, there was the usual confession of sin and prayer. (Neh. i, 4; Dan. ix, 4.) Whether it is for doing or daring, such a preparation is most pious, and surely helpful. It quiets the mind and brings us into communion with God, and the fear of the Lord as well as the joy of the Lord becomes our strength. Luther used to say, if he had but three days in which to do a thing for God, he would spend two of them in prayerful preparation for it.

2. **Her heroism.**—Sending her answer to Mordecai, she announced to him her purpose and determination. "So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." Like Paul, she no longer counted her life dear to herself, and was ready to die for Christ's sake. (Acts xx, 24; xxi, 13.) This is one of the most pathetic as well as brave speeches on record. It was neither despair nor fatalism, but the deliberate determination to offer up her life on the altar of her duty to God and to her people. In our way we may be as brave in the discharge of our duty. If we go from the presence of the Great King we need not fear to go into the presence of any earthly one, even though we take our life in our hand. Mordecai was satisfied. His noble niece had not failed or disappointed him. He was glad, and went his way to proclaim and hold the fast with the Jews.

IV.—ESTHER TRIUMPHANT.

After the fast Esther went in before the king, and having appeared there she was received with favor and won her cause.

1. **In royal apparel.**—Esther had not of late been in favor with the king. Her task was a hard one, and the risks great; but her woman's wit did not fail her. Instead of putting on sackcloth and

ashes she arrayed herself splendidly "in royal apparel." She dressed herself with scrupulous care, so that she might appear before the king in a way most calculated to charm and delight him. It is not difficult to suppose that when Esther appeared in the inner court of the king's house and in the presence of her august master and husband, she was a vision of loveliness. Her beauty, her grace, and her sweetness, all enhanced by the care and elegance of her dress, captivated the king's admiration and immediately won his favor. It is even so that we must come before the King of heaven, arrayed in royal apparel, but that apparel is the blood-washed garment of Christ's righteousness. The vilest sinner is lovely in the eyes of God when he comes thus arrayed (Ezek. xvi, 14), and to such an one the golden scepter is certain to be stretched out.

2. The golden scepter.—As soon as the king saw who it was and how she was arrayed, the golden scepter was presented to her, and she touched the top of it in acknowledgment of the mercy shown her. Not only was her life given her, but the utmost of her request granted in oriental style, "even to the half of the king's kingdom." So are we accepted, and guaranteed that, ask what we will, it shall be granted unto us. God's scepter is one of royal power, of royal mercy and favor, and of royal bounty. Esther's approach into the presence of the king carried a risk with it—she was accepted, for her own personal beauty and according to the caprice of a tyrannical oriental monarch; but when the sinner comes into God's presence clothed in the name of Christ, he comes with an absolute certainty of success, based on the eternal purpose of God's grace, guaranteed by the finished work of Christ, and warranted by his oath-bound word. To such an one God says: "Thou art accepted, and all things in Christ are yours."

XII.

THE VANITY OF IDOLS.—Isaiah xlv, 9-20.

(9) They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. (10) Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing? (11) Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed; and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together. (12) The smith with the tongs both worketh in the coals, and fashioneth it with hammers, and worketh it with the strength of his arms: yea, he is hungry, and his strength faileth: he drinketh no water, and is faint. (13) The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he marketh it out with the compass, and maketh it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. (14) He heweth him down cedars, and taketh the cypress and the oak, which he strengtheneth for himself among the trees of the forest: he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it. (15) Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. (16) He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast, and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: (17) And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god. (18) They have not known nor understood: for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. (19) And none considereth in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yea, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? (20) He feedeth on ashes: a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?—Isaiah xlv, 9-20.

I am writing in a country where for centuries the worship of idols has prevailed among the millions of people who inhabit the land; where the whole system of idol worship has so utterly besotted and blinded the minds of their devotees, that otherwise intelligent, acute, and even profound minds seem incapable of discerning between the work of their own hands and the God who made them. The people *en masse* are sunken into a degradation of superstition and moral filth which almost passes belief. Thus surrounded, I can

in a deeper way appreciate the force both of the reasoning and sarcasm of the great prophet of Israel in his scathing exposures and denunciations of idols, and enter into the indignation which he feels against a people whose God is Jehovah, for surrendering themselves to this God-dishonoring and soul-destroying worship. I am sure the people at home can have but little idea of the frightful ruin that idol-worship has wrought among these millions of people, and how utterly idolatry has enslaved and degraded the intellectual as well as the moral perception of the people. It has spread such a pall over the whole land, and the mental and moral darkness is so dense, that even the European, and, I may say, even the Christian element of the population out here feels its deadly pressure. What a London fog is to the outward man that attempts to walk through it, so are idolatry and the whole intellectual and moral life which has sprung up and for centuries flourished under the patronage of idols to those who live and move in this country. I have often wondered, while reading the account of Israel's apostasy from God to idols, how such a people (how, indeed, any people capable of thinking and reasoning) could be led away into the wild and fanatical devotion to idols which characterized them. While the abstract problem is as great as ever, the fact of the power of idolatry is as patent in this land as it was in Israel. The people of God at home should not cease to pray for the destruction of idolatry out of the world. It is a real and monstrous fact, and stands directly in the way of the progress of the Gospel. So great is the strange fascination or infatuation which it has wrought upon the people that there are thousands of highly cultivated natives in this land who will frankly admit the utter absurdity of idol-worship, and its necessarily degrading influence upon the people, and yet go slavishly to the temples and bow down to these stocks and stones, and submit to all the absurd and monstrous rites prescribed by the priests.

The sin of idolatry had culminated in Israel, and the time of their punishment for their great and persistent apostasy was drawing near. Isaiah had seen and prophesied their captivity, but was now led by the Spirit of God to speak to them some words of comfort based on the faithfulness of God concerning future blessings in store for them, when God should pour upon them again his Spirit, as "floods upon the dry ground"; and the ancient and restored people should "spring up as among the grass and as willows by the water courses"; and how even the heathen among whom they had been dispersed, the very idolaters themselves whose sins they had imitated—when they beheld the favor of their God, would make

haste to ally themselves to Jehovah and call themselves by his name. (vs. 3-5.) God affirms his eternal existence, as being the "first and the last," their Creator, their Redeemer, and their King, and calls upon them to remember that they are witnesses to the fact that he is the only and solitary God in the universe, and has proved himself so by the prophecies he had given them and by having fulfilled them to the very letter. Their own punishment was a fulfillment of prophecy. This test he defies the idolaters to submit to, and, because there is no such thing as prophecy and its fulfillment among idols, shows how utterly absurd it is for his people to allow themselves to be mixed up with it. "Ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God." (v. 8.)

He gives them another proof of his Godhead, as well as his faithfulness to them whom he had taken into covenant with himself (v. 28), in the prophecy concluding this chapter in connection with Cyrus, who, two hundred years hence, should set them free from their impending captivity.

The reasons given for this address (in which the being and faithfulness of God is contrasted with the vanity of idols) may be found in part, that: (i) They need not hope in any other God beside him. (ii) They need not fear any other God beside him. (iii) That during their coming and long captivity they might comfort themselves with his promises, being themselves witnesses to the fact that what he promises and foretells he is able to fulfill. (iv) That thus strengthened they might be able to resist the temptations to which they would be peculiarly exposed in a land to which they were about to be carried and which was wholly given up to idol-worship, without the help to them of their Temple and outward forms of worship.

I.—THE SENSELESS FOLLY OF IDOLATRY.

In verses nine to eleven the prophet challenges the idolaters (both the makers and the worshipers of idols) to clear or defend themselves, if they can, from the charge of senselessness and folly in connection with their vanities.

1. The senselessness of them that make idols.—"They that make a graven image are all of them vanity." That is, they prove themselves to be either "empty" of sense, or in a state of such mental chaos as to prove themselves little, if any, better than idiots. Jeremiah charges the same folly upon them when he says that "every man is brutish by his knowledge"—that is, the pretended knowledge which leads men to make idols is more senseless and un-

reasoning than the knowledge that brutes possess. "Every founder" (or maker) "is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them." (Jer. li, 17.) To ascribe creation and power to a stock and stone which has been hewn or carved out by man's hands from the very materials of creation, and to worship such a thing, is itself a proof of the derangement of the mind. Paul, when he was debating with the learned and cultivated Athenians, said the same thing: "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things. . . . Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." (Acts xvii, 24, 25, 29.) What can be a greater absurdity than this, that they who should know that they are made by God, make gods themselves.

2. The profitlessness of idols.—"And their delectable things shall not profit." The idols which they have made, which they worship, and in which they take such delight, on which they bestow their wealth, and to whom they pour out their homage, to whom they pray, and to whom they ascribe blessings, are practically profitless to them. They never lift their hands to help; their ears cannot hear, their eyes cannot see them. In time of trouble they cannot deliver them. The demonstration of this was made by Elijah on Mt. Carmel when he summoned the prophets of Baal to the supreme test, and there mocked them with the profitlessness of their idols. (I. Kings xviii, 27-29.) So we may say of all those false resources to which men resort who turn their backs upon God. "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not?" (Is. lv, 2.)

3. They are their own witnesses.—God has his witnesses in *his* people. (v. 8.) Their whole history shows that their God was a living God, declaring his will, foretelling all events appertaining to them, giving innumerable promises, and fulfilling them all to the letter. Now the idolaters are in like manner *their* own witnesses. When did ever an idol foretell an event? When did an idol ever make a promise and fulfill it? When did idols ever do them any good, *e. g.*, deliver them out of any trouble when they called upon them? I have often challenged the idolaters of this land on these points, and they are all constrained to confess that the idol is dumb, and dead, and powerless to help. Let the condition of the land, the

degradation of the people, their recent subjugation to a handful of people who are the worshipers of the true God, testify to their folly.

4. They are willfully blind and ignorant.—"They see not, nor know." One of the effects of idolatry is that it has completely closed the eyes of the people to the simplest facts, and their hearts to the simplest knowledge. Their eyes and their hearts are "smeared over with pitch." "When they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. . . . Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever." (Rom. i, 21-25.) This same effect is produced upon all those who live not in idol-lands who yet turn away from God. Their foolish hearts are darkened. This is one of the effects of sin and all willful impiety.

5. They are all put to shame.—In verses ten and eleven God calls upon these makers and worshipers of idols to stand up and be gathered together and defend themselves, or to make proof of their idols. "They shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together." Here again we are reminded of that solemn challenge given by Elijah through Ahab to the priests of Baal and of Jezebel. What happened to these idolaters on Mt. Carmel, what subsequently happened to the priest of Baal under the cruel reign of Jehu, what happened to Ahab and to Jezebel, will happen to all idolaters. In the day of trial and judgment their idols will not answer nor help them; but they will together be confounded and destroyed. And this is but a type of what will happen to all infidels and unbelievers. God suffers long with sinners, but at last he will gather them all together and give them opportunity to defend themselves and justify their idolatrous and sinful courses. This they cannot do. Then will fear seize upon them and confusion and destruction overtake them.

II.—IDOLS AND IDOL-MAKERS RIDICULED.

Having set the solemn proposition of the sin and folly of idolatry before them, the prophet now bursts out into a strain of lofty satire and ridicule.

1. The manufacture of idols described.—They are of two kinds: those made of metal and those made of wood. The makers of these idols are blacksmiths and carpenters. (i) The blacksmith. With his tongs he arranges the coals of his fire; with his tools he cuts off a piece of iron; and with his hammer, after heating it in the

fire, he fashions it with the strength of his arms. He works hard over it until he is tired and hungry, and faint with fatigue and thirst gendered by the heat of his forge. He is making a god to worship. This man, who spends his strength until he is weary, hungry, and thirsty, is able to make a god. What folly! what monstrous absurdity! It is a wonder that he does not break out into laughter as he thus hammers away at his god, thrusting it into the fire and taking it out again. But he is blinded, and knows not. Awful effect of sin! (ii) The carpenter. The prophet, having described the process by which the iron or metal gods are made, now turns his attention to the manufacture of the wooden gods. Having gotten his wood, he lays it down and with a rule he measures off a piece according to the size he intends making the god; with a piece of red chalk and a line he marks out a rude outline of its form; then with his plane he cuts away the superfluous wood, and guided by his compass, which helps him to mark out the curves of the figure, he proceeds with his work. He fashions it after the image of man. This indeed is the best and highest image he can find, and so far he does well. But what folly! His god is like to a beautiful man; but after all, a man in the height of his beauty is but a poor, weak, sinful, and dying creature; yet this is to be his god. Not even a man, but only the image of a man made out of wood. God indeed put honor upon man when he made his moral nature after his own moral image; but now man puts dishonor upon God when he makes him "in respect of bodily parts and members" after the image of a man, and then sets it up in his house or in a temple and worships it.

2. The source of the material out of which the idol is made.

—Still further to expose this hideous folly, the prophet takes us out of the carpenter's shop and leads us into the forest where he gets his material. Here the idol-maker selects a tall cedar, cypress, or an oak, which he has before trained to straightness for this purpose, or which itself may be fairer and straighter than the other trees. He at least selects the best material of the forest. Or possibly he has planted an ash tree himself and bestowed upon it some careful culture, accepting the very rain which God sends upon the earth to contribute to its growth. Out of these trees he is to get material with which to make a god, to whom he will ascribe the power of rain and life. That is, he turns the effect into the cause, and declares the tree that God has made is the god that made the tree. The tree which is indeed useful for fire-wood (and which, as a matter of fact, he does use for that purpose to bake his bread with) he converts by the skill and art of his own hand into the god before which he falls

down and worships. As a matter of fact, he does not sanctify the whole tree: he first cuts it down; then he takes a part of it; with its limbs and branches, and the chips which have fallen from his ax, chisel, and plane, he kindles his fire, with which to roast his meat and warm himself by. Nay, he eats the flesh which he has roasted with a part of this tree, and warms himself by the fire he has made out of it, and delights himself with this warmth; and even when he seeks the springing flame he draws near to it and congratulates himself on its cheerful aspect and genial heat, and says: "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire." Thus the tree out of which he is making or has made his god he actually uses as his servant to prepare his food and warm his body. He reduces it to ashes, consuming it with fire. And yet with the residue of this tree, with a part of which he has cooked his food and warmed his body, "he maketh a god," even a graven image: "he falleth down unto it, and worshipeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, 'Deliver me, for thou art my god.'" It is said that Diagoras of Melos, a scholar of Democritus, cast a wooden statue of Hercules into the fire and said mockingly: "Come, Hercules, and perform thy thirteenth labor, and help me to cook these turnips." Even the heathen poets used to upbraid the idolaters of the western world with the folly of their idolatry. So Horace, in his first satire:

"In days of yore our godship stood
A very worthless log of wood,
The joiner doubting, or to shape us
Into a stool or a Priapus,
At length resolved, for reasons wise,
Into a god to bid us rise."

Another of them threatens the idol to whom he had committed the custody of his woods that, if he did not preserve them to be fuel for his fire, he should himself be made use of for that purpose:

"Drive the plunderers away and preserve the wood for thy master's hearth, or thou thyself shall be converted into fuel."

One of the effects of missionary teaching out here in India was related to me by a missionary. A little girl who had been in a mission-school had been taught the folly of idolatry: that idols were but stocks of wood, and had no power either to do them good or harm. The lesson had dwelt in the child's mind, so that one day, taking a little companion with her, she went to one of the many wayside shrines in which there was a small wooden idol. The children drew near to it, and, standing by the door, the pupil of the mission-school first looked at it, made a face at it, and laughed.

For a moment her old superstitious fear got the better of her and she fled in terror. Finding, however, that the idol did not pursue, she went back and spat in its face, then fled again. But since this second and worst insult which could be put upon it did not arouse its anger, the child and her companion returned, boldly entered the shrine, and with her foot kicked over the idol and sat down upon it. This entirely confirmed the child in the teaching she had received. The news of her feat spread through the village, and the villagers went out to see, and finding the idol prostrate and helpless, a great many of them from that moment gave up worshipping the idols, and some of them became Christians.

III.—THE JUDGMENT UPON IDOLATRY.

The prophet points out two judgments upon this wretched folly, effects rising out of it rather than being visited upon them from without.

1. They become blind and senseless to their own folly.—“They have not known nor understood; for he hath shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand.” They have lost the power of reason in this matter. They cannot see the inconsistency and folly, the blind idiocy, of taking a tree and with part cooking their food and making a fire to warm themselves, and with the residue making an idol before which they bow down and worship. Having deliberately committed themselves to this folly (when first they knew it to be folly), God has allowed the folly to work its ruin upon their intellectual and moral nature. “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.” (Rom. i, 28.)

2. They are left to feed on ashes.—Instead of getting any good out of their worship, which, if it were directed to the true God, would bring them blessings and pleasure, they are left to feed on ashes. All the real good has gone out of their life and out of the common blessings of God’s providence, and they get, as it were, but the ashes of things.

3. They live with a lie in their right hand.—Having willingly lent themselves to these delusions and persisted in them, their hearts have become deceived with their own deceivings, and they become powerless to free themselves from it, and continue to live with a lie in their right hand. Is not idolatry a lie? Is it not apparent to all men of sense? Nay, these idolaters even admit it themselves, and

yet they persist in it. Is it not so with all men who willingly live in sin? They know it is sin, yet they continue to live in it, and so living they cannot get rid of it. Justifying themselves, they lie, and they know it, and yet go on living it. This is the judgment of God upon such folly,—they are left to believe their lie and be damned with it still in their hand. The lessons from idolatry are applicable to all who are living in known and willful sin. This should be seriously laid to heart before sin becomes the fixed habit of the soul, and hopelessly blinds the eyes and darkens the understanding.

XIII.

REVIEW OR OPTIONAL LESSON.

XIV.

JOB'S AFFLICTIONS.—Job ii, 1-10.

(1) Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord. (2) And the Lord said unto Satan, From whence comest thou? And Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. (3) And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. (4) And Satan answered the Lord, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. (5) But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. (6) And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life. (7) So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. (8) And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. (9) Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. (10) But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.—Job ii, 1-10.

By common consent of all literary critics the Book of Job is the oldest and the finest poem in the world. Both Gibbon the infidel, and Carlyle, a master in criticism, agree that it is the outstanding piece of literature in the libraries of the world. And yet it is a book that is not much read even by Bible readers; perhaps because the argument is difficult to follow, perhaps because few have come to understand that, though written in proverbial form, its argument is sustained and continuous from beginning to end; and so it ought to be read through, if not at a single sitting, at least with the remembrance of what has gone before, if it is to be taken up at intervals in the reading.

That Job was a real person there can be little doubt, though some critics have maintained that the whole book, characters and all, is a fictitious work, designed to serve the purpose of teaching, much as our Lord's parables did. Nevertheless the facts that the prophet Ezekiel speaks of Job as a real person (associating him with Noah and Daniel) (Ezek. xiv, 14) and that James refers to him as the great example of patience (James v, 11) would seem to settle the question of the reality of his person and character.

The story itself may be either a literal history, or it may be a dramatized story based on substantial facts, much as Shakespeare has dramatized the histories of some of the English kings. In either case, the story is equally valuable. I am inclined to the opinion that the story is a true and literal one, and that it has been preserved by the good providence of God, and handed down to us, first by oral tradition, and afterward put into writing and made permanent by some unknown author; much as the Homeric tales have been preserved to us, first by oral tradition, and afterward by some great poet who edited them and wrote them out. It is quite possible that in the editing of the traditional story of Job and his friends the editor has taken some literary license and put the whole into the perfect literary shape in which we have it.

Job himself was a patriarch of Uz and lived in the middle age between Abraham and Moses; and the events recorded in the book must therefore have taken place long before Moses wrote his law or any of the institutions of the Hebrew worship were known. The absence of all reference to any former Scripture, to Jerusalem, to the law, or to any ceremonial in connection with the Jewish economy is sufficient proof of that. There is in the whole of Job's utterances a continual undertone of outcry for a revelation, which seems never to have been given up to the time when Jehovah spoke. The piety and worship of Job was either what might be called the highest type of natural religion, or one based on the original traditions which had come down from Noah. The latter is the most probable. The Noachian traditions must have still been fresh in Job's time, not to speak of the further rumors of truth which had come through Abraham. The book in its present form was probably written in the later days of the Solomonic age. That is, the history recorded belonged to an age about the sixteenth century before Christ, whereas the writing of the history was of date somewhere between the seventh and eighth centuries before Christ. This story had evidently been handed down from generation to generation during seven or eight hundred years, and then finally reduced to writing by the hand of some one whom God no doubt guided and taught by his Holy Spirit.

To give an analysis of the book is beyond our purpose, and would require more space than is at our disposal. It is enough to say for the present that the grand argument of the book turns on the relation of affliction to sin in the person of the afflicted, and on its use as an instrument for the sanctification and discipline of the righteous, without regard to special sin, or sins, committed by the afflicted one. It has also been called the book of "individual discipline

for the learning of self." An acute student of it has also seen in it an allegory of man, or of humanity in connection with trial, sin, and redemption. From this point of view we may study man in Job under the following heads: (i) Job the righteous man (Adam) before his trial. (ii) Job (Adam) under trial. (iii) Job's (Adam's) fall or failure under trial. (iv) The failure of Experience, Tradition, and Law (the three friends who contended with Job) to humble him (man). (v) Job's (man's) self-righteousness. (vi) Job under revelation. (vii) Job under God's direct and personal teaching. (viii) Job under conviction and repentance. (ix) Job forgiven. (x) Job restored and glorified. As the plan of our studies does not allow us to go through the whole book, but only to "sample it," we must make the best of the four portions which have been assigned to us.

I.—THE SECOND HEAVENLY MEETING.

The first six verses of this chapter must be studied in connection with chapter i, 6-12, as they but repeat in detail what happened in both days, with the altered circumstances of the second trial. We are introduced by the dramatist into heaven itself, and are shown what is going on there. We need not suppose this to be a fancy sketch or a mere bit of imagination on the part of the writer. There is no reason why the events here portrayed should not have actually occurred. We know that similar events are described in other parts of the Bible. (I. Kings xxii, 19-22; Zech. iii, 1, 2; Rev. xii, 9.) This scene shows us a grand council of the angels in the presence of God. Among them comes one who is described as the "adversary" or the "accuser." The word "Satan" is not properly a name, but an adjective describing the angel to whom it applies, by his chief characteristic. From this scene we are led to believe that though Satan was, and is, a fallen spirit, he still had access then to the presence of God and gathered with the other "sons of God" on great occasions to worship or to receive instructions as to ministry. Here Satan is seen as fallen but not banished, and still obliged to serve the purpose of God in any ministry he might be sent to perform. His chief independent business seems to have been that of malignity "going to and fro on the earth," minutely inspecting the doings of men and discovering and reporting evil wherever he could find it. We may not hope fully to understand all that is intimated in this dramatic picture; but some lessons seem certain. (i) That the affairs of this earth are under the observation of Heaven; and that that observation goes into the detail of taking notice of indi-

vidual men. (ii) That there are countless happy spirits whose business seems to be to minister to the wants and necessities of men, and to conduct them mysteriously and all unobserved through the mazes of this life; in fact, "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." (Heb. i, 14.) That there is also (or was at that time) one spirit equal with the others in creation, who, though fallen from high fellowship with the holy angels, was still allowed (or perhaps commanded) to be present with them on certain fixed occasions to give an account of his doings. "And Satan came also" seems not so much the record of a daring presumption as of a fact orderly and expected. (iii) That though there are doubtless myriads of evil spirits in the universe, "angels who kept not their first estate," there are no equal powers contending and struggling in perpetual and uncertain conflict for the mastery of the moral and material prizes of the earth or the universe. God is revealed to be in supreme authority and power over Satan, compelling him to give an account of himself, and only allowing him to go to the extent of his (God's) will in any matter. This teaches that all these ministries, good and evil, are alike compelled to work together for the final and highest good of man. In respect of Satan it would seem that his place among the sons of God had been forfeited or changed by the time of our Lord, who on one occasion exclaimed, "I saw Satan as lightning falling from heaven." (Luke x, 18.) Whether this was a prophetic vision, or one just then taking place, it is difficult to say; but a comparison with Rev. xii, 8, 9 would suggest the former view. Whether Satan still has access to the heavenly places and to the periodical audiences given to the unfallen angels, or whether he be limited now to the earth and the air as the "God of this world and the Prince of the Power of the Air," it is still *certain* that he is under the power of God, and can go no further in his malignant enmity to man than he is allowed; and moreover it is true that he is so shorn of his power in connection with all believers in Christ that the least of them may so "resist him" that he "will flee from them."

1. "Whence comest thou?"—This was the challenge of God to Satan on this occasion. It is in precisely the same words as those used on a former occasion (i, 7), and seems to be a demand for a report. The reply of Satan to the question is also the same as that previously given. (i, 7.) "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." This restless characteristic of Satan corresponds with what is said of him in the New Testament, where he is described as a "roaring lion" going "about, seeking whom

he may devour." (I. Pet. v, 8.) He is a restless and malignant being, and can find no rest (Matt. xii, 43), and he is envious of the rest or peace of any and all other creatures. This "accuser" and "devourer" would soon make short work of men on the earth, were he not closely kept in check by the all-powerful hand of God. As the accuser he had been walking to and fro and up and down in the earth, making inspection of and narrowly scrutinizing the actions of men in order to bring charges against them before God. He can never be happy except in the downfall of others. We are not told of his general report, but the further question put to him would imply that he had made one in respect of some men whom he had seen and scrutinized. This is still his business and his privilege. But "who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" That is, who shall bring a successful charge against a Christian? Not that Christians never lay themselves open to serious charges, but "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous"; and "if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive" them.

2. "**Hast thou considered my servant Job?**"—Once before this question or challenge had been made to Satan. (i, 8.) It would imply that Satan had been bringing wholesale charges against all men and denouncing them as being without goodness, and perhaps taunting even God (for he is equal to that) with the statement that his pet race of human beings is a failure, and that with man there is no righteousness. God had then pointed him to Job as "a perfect man and an upright, one that feareth God and escheweth evil." To this Satan had replied that Job's goodness was all the result of selfishness, and that God had blessed him above all other men, filling him with all bounties, and hedging him about, so that evil could not befall him. That he feared God and eschewed evil, because that was the more profitable course to pursue. He went so far as to say that if God should take away his good things and withdraw his protection, Job would not only cease to fear God and follow after righteousness, but would curse God to his face. (i, 10, 11.) In fact, Satan laid down his fundamental proposition in the words: "Doth Job fear God for naught?" In other words, Satan makes this charge: That there is no goodness in man that is not purely selfish, and that God is himself incapable of inspiring in man any feeling of unselfish reverence, or motive for goodness. Thus this accuser utters his slanders no less against man than against God. God had accepted that challenge, and permitted Satan to strip Job of all worldly and earthly good. This he had done (chapter i), and in answer to it Job, in-

stead of "cursing God," had blessed him, acknowledging God's right to take away what he had given, and that he was as much to be praised for the taking as for the giving. (i, 20-22.) Satan's accusations had been proved false. Now there comes another day in which the heavenly hosts meet and Satan gives in his report again. Again he is challenged with the case of Job. God defends and vindicates his servant, and expresses a degree of pity for him, in that he had put him to so sore and unmerited trial. "Although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without a cause, still he holdeth fast his integrity." This was a crushing answer to Satan's mean and jealous charge of supreme selfishness, and in it we also detect a note of rejoicing in God's words on account of the integrity of his servant under the sorest afflictions. In this we see two things: (i) That trials may come upon the righteous without a cause—that is, without implying any fault in them—and for higher purposes than of mere chastisement; (ii) that God in heaven is glad, and takes great joy in the faithfulness of his servants on the earth. No good deed done, no integrity kept under trial, without God rejoicing in it!

3. "Skin for skin."—To the answer of God that under trial Job *had* kept his integrity and shown himself a righteous man for righteousness' sake, and that he feared God because God was worthy of being feared without reference to good or ill proceeding from his hands, Satan renews his attack against the integrity of Job, and further declared that all his piety is purely and supremely selfish, and that even now he was more selfish in cleaving to God than he had been before. To state his point he uses an expression which has come to be a proverb: "Skin for skin; yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." Many interpretations of this saying of Satan have been suggested; but all agree that it is intended to represent the thought that Job's integrity was still in the nature of a bargain with God. The first part of the saying, "skin for skin," means that in barter Job got a "hide" in the protection which he had received from God, and he gave a "hide" in his external reverence and religious fear. It is like the old proverb which says, "Give an apple to him that hath an orchard." The concluding portion of Satan's answer shows how deep and cruel is his intense hatred: "Yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." This would say that Job still kept his integrity because God had spared his life. He could well afford to lose all his property and even his children, so long as his own skin (or life) was safe; "but," said Satan, to prove that Job's righteousness is after all but a bargain, and that

his selfishness goes down to the very bone, "put forth thine hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." Thus did Satan slander Job, and make his own vile and selfish mind the measure by which he judged all men, even the best. He could not understand how any one *could* serve God for naught, or maintain his integrity without a selfish motive, and therefore he doubted Job, even though he had already given one great proof of sincerity. "He," said Satan, "is only holding on to thee for the sake of his own life. With that and health he may recover his prosperity and hope for future gain; therefore he holds fast his integrity. But take away his health, touch his flesh and his bones, and he will fling thee out of his mouth, and his integrity too." This was the spirit of Satan's charge against Job.

II.—JOB DELIVERED A SECOND TIME FOR TRIAL.

For the final good and glory of Job, Satan is allowed to put forth his hand upon his person, and by the severest physical afflictions to put his integrity once more to the test.

1. "**But save his life.**"—Job was delivered into Satan's hands to do with him what he pleased, only he was not permitted to take his life away. Here we have an intimation that sicknesses, disease, and calamity may be a part of the devil's work, but that he is very limited in the use of this power. He may not take life, or even afflict with disease or send other troubles, except by the direct permission of God. This whole story opens up a wonderful chapter in connection with the subject of affliction. We know from the Scriptures that God has *himself* afflicted people with disease as a punitive measure (Ex. xii, 23; Num. xi, 33; xii, 10; Ps. cvii, 17-20; II. Sam. xii, 15; xxiv, 15; II. Kings xix, 35); and here we see that he has allowed Satan to put forth his hand and sorely afflict one of his servants, in whom there was no fault. Unless, then, we can know the "secret of the Lord," it is impossible for us to determine what afflictions may mean. In Job's case we see that one of his greatest difficulties in connection with it was that he was not conscious of any wrong-doing.

2. **Job smitten with boils.**—It is true that Satan's challenge had stipulated for the actual taking of his life; but in that case it would not have been possible to determine whether his integrity would have stood fast. So it was arranged that his life should be spared, though inside that line Satan was allowed liberty to deal with him. He, in the exercise of that liberty, "smote Job with

sore boils." It is believed that the disease with which Job was smitten was the worst form of black leprosy, called in our day elephantiasis. "Beginning with grievous ulcers, it eats like a cancer through the whole body, swelling the limbs, especially at the joints, into monstrous lumps, till they resemble the limbs of an elephant, even at times causing them to drop off piecemeal." This indeed was to Job (or would be to most) far worse than death. "So that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life." We see this once great, wealthy, and honored man stripped of all his property, bereft at once of all his children, utterly broken and cast out, covered with a loathsome disease, sitting on a great heap of ashes and scraping the fetid ulcers and discharge from his body—a sight which made him an object of contempt to the people and of loathing to himself. Moreover, according to the prevailing philosophy, his present condition was proof positive that he was, after all, a great sinner, and now his years of hypocrisy had been laid bare by the hand of the Almighty.

III.—JOB AND HIS WIFE.

Up to this time the wife of Job has not appeared on the scene. We may infer that she had quietly acquiesced in the first trial and had gone with her husband in his sublime submission; but now she breaks out into a kind of wild and passionate grief, and shouts out an advice to the faithful servant which he rejects with promptness and dignity.

1. "Curse God and die."—Great controversy has arisen among interpreters as to the true meaning of this advice of Job's wife. That her heart was wrung with bitter grief at the loss of her children and the sweeping away of their fortune and the consequent degradation from their former high and prominent position there can be no doubt; but now, even worse than anything else that had gone before, she sees her beloved and honored husband an object of loathing to himself and of scorn and ridicule to all the neighbors, and even the butt of jibes from thoughtless young men and children. No wonder her heart was swept with strong passion. Even if we accept the traditional interpretation, we can hardly wonder at it. There are three ways of interpreting the advice, and the words will bear any one of the interpretations equally well. (i) "Curse God and die." This is what Satan at first said Job would do under this trial, and perhaps he too had something to do with inspiring Job's wife to suggest this course to him. In this case she would be a fit

representative of the theory of Satan. "God has utterly forsaken you; there is no profit longer in holding fast to your integrity. The battle is over, and it has gone against you. You cannot longer enjoy life, and life to you is not worth the living, nor to me to have you live on in this condition of loathsome suffering. I love you too well to see you survive your downfall. But when you die fling your curse at God, whom you have so long and so faithfully worshiped, but who has abandoned you and returned you evil for good." (ii) "Bless God and die." The word may be translated "bless" as well as "curse." In this case it would seem either a word counseling submission or the most bitter irony. "You blessed him before when he stripped you of fortune and children, and he has sent this cruel thing upon you; you have only to bless him again and this God of yours will next take your life away. Hasten the process." (iii) "Confess to God and die." Afflictions, as has been stated, were, according to the belief of that time, the certain result of sins, and were sent as punishment and for correction. In the former trial Job had praised God, but had made no confession of sin. Now comes a second and even worse cloud of afflictions. It looked like proof positive that Job had been guilty of some secret sin which he was still hiding. Hence the advice of his wife to make a clean breast of it before he died. Or it might have been advice which, if taken, might be the means of sparing his life. I cannot but think, however, that the sense is to be found in the two former suggestions. Nor should we be hasty in utterly condemning this woe-stricken wife. If her heart flamed up in sudden and indignant passion against God, who seemed to her to have wantonly afflicted her noble and beloved husband, it is not very surprising considering our frail human nature. It may have been a shocking speech; "but consider," says an able writer, "to what repeated shocks it was the echo." God did not cast her off for it, nor lay it up against her, but raised her up with Job in the end, and caused her to be the sharer again of his honor, happiness, and glory. Let us be no less charitable in our judgment of her.

2. Job's answer.—There is nothing nobler in the history of man than the reply of Job to his despairing wife. She had unconsciously added to his bitterness and affliction by her stinging words, all the more so that he loved her and knew her true woman's love to him, and that it was on his account that she had given way at last to her agony and sorrow. Job's answer was as gentle toward her as it was magnificently noble toward God. It is as though he had said: "Thy advice is not worthy of thee. Thou speakest as one of the foolish

women who have neither piety nor reason, and not like thy true self. Have we not before talked this matter all over, especially after our children's deaths, and did we not reach a conclusion which we both agreed to stand by? There is great mystery in this dispensation, but still we may not doubt the goodness of God in any case. 'What? shall we receive good at the hands of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil?'" In this reply Job neither sinned with his lips nor with his heart. Moreover, he completely refuted the sneering charge of the devil that his piety was a matter of pure selfishness on his part, and that God in himself, apart from gifts, could not inspire reverence and love. Job says here that God is not to be loved and worshiped because of the good he sends, nor abandoned because of the evil he sends, but for himself alone, apart from gifts. A real piety pierces these things through, and takes hold on God. There may be mystery and agonizing questionings, but God is good, and as such we must cleave to him as our only good and refuge. Neither is good good without God, nor is ill ill so long as we have God. "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." (James v, 11.)

XV.

AFFLICTIONS SANCTIFIED.—Job v, 17-27.

(17) Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: (18) For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole. (19) He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. (20) In famine he shall redeem thee from death: and in war from the power of the sword. (21) Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue: neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh. (22) At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh: neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth. (23) For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee. (24) And thou shalt know that thy tabernacle shall be in peace; and thou shalt visit thy habitation, and shalt not sin. (25) Thou shalt know also that thy seed shall be great, and thine offspring as the grass of the earth. (26) Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season. (27) Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good.—Job v, 17-27.

How long Job had been under the afflicting hand of God it is impossible to tell. Different scholars and students have advanced different theories. Some place the present circumstances at not later than two months from the first blow that fell upon him. Others set it forward as long as two years. The only method we have of ascertaining the time is from the internal evidence suggested by the progress of the tragedy. "There was a day" is the only allusion to time in the matter. The probability seems to be that a considerable time had elapsed between the first and second strokes. Considering that the objects of the affliction were the self-revelation, discipline, and the spiritual training and culture of Job's character, we conclude that the element of time had a good deal to do with the work. To have followed up the loss of property and children immediately with the terrible affliction of his body would rather have tended to stun than to discipline the mind and spirit of Job. It would be safe, I think, to put an interval of twelve months between the first blow and the second. Then what of the length of time between the second affliction—the falling upon him of the loathsome disease which drove him from his house to the village ash-heap, and from his friends to the solitary exile of the despised leper, and made him utterly wish to die—and the coming to him of those three celebrated

friends, "Job's comforters," as they are traditionally called? If it was the purpose of God, in overruling these temptations or trials, to give them time to work into his soul—for the first stunning pain and the confusion of mind necessarily produced by them to pass away, and the more deliberate consideration of the heart to have play—then we must allow several weeks, if not months. The coming of Job's friends from what was evidently a distance would imply that some time has elapsed since his last affliction had fallen upon him, as in the olden times news of any kind traveled slowly; communication between friends at a distance from each other was infrequent. These three friends were men of note, each of them probably great prophets or teachers in their own country, and their coming would seem to have been the result of conferences between them, most likely carried on by correspondence. The first calamity which befell Job, and of which possibly they had heard without thinking it wise or necessary to make him a personal visit, had, therefore, passed. It was one that was not irreparable, so long as Job's health and strength were left to him. This second affliction, however, coming as a second stroke, was so marked that these religious teachers, philosophers and seers, were both profoundly impressed that the hand of God was in it, and deeply moved on Job's own account, whom they (with all the rest of the world in which they lived) profoundly revered and respected. Therefore, at last, they felt it their duty to arrange a visit to Job both to condole with him and to inquire into the meaning of so unusual a dispensation. It does not seem charitable to think that any other motive entered into their hearts in making this visit; but it is not altogether contrary to human nature that there was some curiosity to see how Job was taking these things, and to know what manner of man this greatest of the princes of their country would prove to be under circumstances which had reduced him to poverty, and sent him an outcast from his kind. A great philosopher has said that there is that vein of depravity in every man that causes a little secret satisfaction in the misfortunes even of our best friend, especially if that friend was a little above us in rank and reputation. It is to be hoped that this is not universally true, yet it is to be feared that it is so far true that it behoves the best of men to guard themselves against so subtle and devilish a meanness.

We left Job sitting miserable and dumb upon the huge ash-heap, scraping his feculent body with a potsherd and bruising his spirit with bitter and hard thoughts, yet without having once broken out with so much as one word of reproach against God. I have seen

these huge dung ash-heaps here in India. They are the result of much burning of brick with cow-dung dried into fuel. After the bricks are so burned that they are gathered out of the ashes which remain on the ground, another kiln is built on the site of the former one, and the ashes of the second burning remain on the top of those of the first, and thus the process goes on until the ash-heap rises sometimes fifty feet in height, and even more. On this pile the village children play and the debris of the community is cast. This, then, was the desolate place to which Job as a leper was outcast, and will account for the fact that the children of the place, gathering about him, and possibly resenting his occupancy of their playground, taunted him with his foul leprosy.

In order to understand the whole course of the mighty argument of the Book of Job, we must endeavor to enter a little into the accepted philosophy of the time, which was held alike by Job and his friends. That philosophy is clearly set forth in the fourth and fifth chapters of the book, and has for substance that blessing and affliction, prosperity and adversity, were the consequences of conduct, or at least the rewards meted out by God upon righteous men or sinners. Such prosperity as Job had formerly enjoyed was the sure sign of Job's integrity; whereas, on the other hand, such afflictions as he was now suffering were an equally sure sign that there was either in Job's actions or character some terrible wickedness which had brought down upon him the chastening hand of God. It is tersely expressed in one of the brief sentences of Eliphaz the Temanite: "Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off? Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same." (iv, 7, 8.) Job had himself treated the adversities of other men on this theory. (iv, 3, 4, 5.) Job, conscious of his own integrity, was plunged by his overwhelming affliction into a very dungeon of doubt and darkness, fast locked up in the prison of the ancient giant Despair. What could it all mean? He could not make it out, though he was taking the best course to do so, namely, keeping silence and "communing with his own heart," with his face turned toward God. Let us try and set the whole picture before us again. That he was afflicted, and that more terribly than any one whom he had before known, there could be no doubt. How great those afflictions were is not seen in the mere fact of the loss of all his great wealth, or even in the sudden bereavement of all his children, or in the further fearful plague which had fallen upon his own body, which was worse than death to him; but in the further facts which he so pathetically

recounts in the nineteenth chapter. God had dealt with him as though he had been his greatest enemy, instead of being his steadfast servant, who feared him always. His brethren and friends were estranged from him. His kinsfolk had failed and his familiar friends had forgotten him. His former tenants and even his serving-maids counted him to be a stranger and an alien. His servants had refused to give him even a cup of water, though he had begged for it. His wife would not speak with him, though he had entreated her in the name and for the sake of their dead children. Young children despised him and taunted him with being a vile, God-smitten, and God-forsaken leper. His intimate friends abhorred him, and those whom he had loved were turned against him. And now the worst of all was come. These three friends had come from afar to condole with him, and it was evident that they more than suspected, yea, even believed, that he was a guilty man, whose offenses were in some sense to be measured by the extent of his afflictions, and throughout their whole debate with him endeavored to extort from him a confession of his guilt. I have said this last was his greatest trial, but it was not. This was his sorest distress, *that he was thrown into the most dreadful doubt concerning God*, whose very justice in dealing with him (according to his theory of God's dealings with men) was questioned. No one who has not passed through a storm of doubt concerning God, who has not paced barefoot over the burning sands of bitter questionings, can know what this trial was to such a man as Job. This was the dilemma he was in. If such afflictions as he was then suffering came only upon the wicked as a punishment for wrong-doing, or at least as an expression of God's displeasure, then it followed that he had grievously offended God by some form of iniquity either of heart or of hand. The most rigorous self-examination, however, failed to convict Job of any such offense. Like Paul, he had served God in all good conscience, and "knew nothing against himself." His integrity was that one thing which he held fast and maintained all through the long controversy with his friends. This may seem a little, or even a good deal, like self-righteousness in Job. Perhaps it was, but nevertheless he was honest in so maintaining his integrity. In vain did his friends try to make him confess iniquity. This he would not do, for his heart condemned him not. His standard was not the spiritual-evangelical one by which we now judge ourselves, but rather the external and legal one by which men measured themselves by themselves in such light as they had in those days before the law was given, by which came "the knowledge of sin." Neither was it possible for his friends to

point out any fault in him. They only *assumed* fault because of *affliction*. To have acknowledged iniquity when he was conscious of none would have been to Job a violation of his whole moral nature, and itself an iniquity. The other horn of the dilemma was this: if he had not done anything to bring these afflictions upon him—if, in fact, God had afflicted him *without a cause*—then the terrible conclusion was forced upon him that God was not just. To Job this was a greater horror than to have confessed himself a transgressor when he knew he was not. To have lost faith in the justice and goodness of God would have been to cast himself adrift upon the wide sea of infidelity and skepticism. Clinging, therefore, as he did, both to his own integrity and to his belief in God as being good and just, these terrible afflictions were an unsolved riddle, and served to torture his mind far worse than his misfortunes had afflicted his outward life or even his “skin.”

Could Job have known the secret cause of these trials; that God was suffering them to come upon him to prove both his own integrity and the glory of God’s character in the face of the devil’s sneering insinuation against them both; that Job’s righteousness and piety were purely selfish; and that there was not that in God himself which would inspire devotion and true piety without the help of temporal good bestowed; could he have known how God had himself vindicated him before his unseen accuser when he said, “Although thou movest me against him to destroy him without cause” (ii, 3); could he have known how in the end God would vindicate and glorify him both before his unseen accuser and in the face of his true but mistaken friends—then, indeed, he would have counted them all as nothing, and laughed with joy and triumph, instead of cursing his day and surrendering himself almost to despair, and wishing himself dead and utterly blotted out of existence, even as though he had never been born. But Job did not know these things; yet his faith somehow clung to both positions which he held in his heart, viz.: that the afflictions were not owing to his transgression, nor were they proof of injustice on God’s part. That magnificent saying of his, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him” (xiii, 15), and that peerless confession of faith which has come down to us living and quivering with divine breath in it, “I know that my Redeemed liveth,” etc. (xix, 19–27), show how truly, after all, Job’s heart was stayed on God. He longed for a clearer revelation from God, and yet he knew enough, no matter how, to enable him to trust God for final vindication.

On the other hand, we must not too harshly judge the friends

who contended with him. It is true that they did not speak the things which were right (xlii, 7), yet they were honest in their convictions and spoke according to their light, and came near to the truth in many things. Especially did the Temanite touch a vital truth, which he had discovered in a vision (iv, 17-21): that the holiest of men are in the sight of God unclean, and therefore ought to humble themselves; that afflictions, even if there is visible no outward cause for them in the way of punitive chastisement, are never causeless, but there is that in man which may account for them as the sparks are accounted for by the fire out of which they "fly upward" (Job v, 7); and that, in general, afflictions which come to the best of men tend to their good and not to their evil. The whole book shows us how profoundly we need a revelation in order to understand both ourselves and God, and how hopeless we are, and helpless in the face of the mysteries of life and providence, without such a revelation. We are prepared now to consider a little more minutely the beautiful words of the Temanite contained in the verses appointed for our study (17-27).

THE LORD LOVETH WHOM HE CHASTENETH.

In the afflictions which came upon Job we see (by having been admitted to the heavenly council) the agency of the devil, and how God overrules even his satanic hate, and uses it instrumentally for our good. His slanders gave to God the opportunity of vindicating both himself and Job, and at the same time an opportunity to discipline Job's character as gold is tried in the fire, separating the dross of self-righteousness from it. (xxxii, 2; xl, 4.)

1. The benefit of affliction.—In the first place, the Temanite lays this down as a truth: "Happy is the man whom God correcteth." He did not know the full significance of this saying as it was afterward expounded in the Epistle to the Hebrews (xii, 5-8), where we are exhorted not to despise or resent the "chastenings of the Lord," nor to give up to despair under their correction, for the Lord means love and good to us by them, and not evil. (Prov. iii, 11, 12; Rev. iii, 19; Jer. xxix, 11.) Paul knew the truth in its fullness which is hinted at here: "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." (II. Cor. iv, 16-18.) If he maketh sore, it is in order that

he may bind up; if he woundeth, it is only that he may heal. The surgeon cuts only to cure, by removing some foul gangrene or some spreading cancer; he breaks the ill-set bone that he may straighten a crooked limb. In the very extremity of trouble he will finally deliver us. Even famine or war, which may come upon us without our agency, shall not put us out of his protection. (Ps. xxvii.) Even the strife of the slanderous tongue shall not harm us, but shall be turned into blessings. (Matt. v, 11.) Destruction may come upon us, but we shall not be afraid of it, for we shall know of a truth that God is in the calamity and well knoweth "how to deliver the godly out of" the trouble.

2. The peaceable fruit of righteousness.—We are told (Heb. xii, 11) that "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby"; that is, to them who accept it as from God, bear it patiently, and wait for God to bring the matter to a conclusion. The statement of the Temanite is, that thus, under God's hand, he will cause everything in the world to work together for our good. The very stones in the field shall be in league with us. Now a stony field at first seems to be a bad field, and the farmer resents the stones and casts them out; but it has been demonstrated in many cases that these loose-lying stones shade the ground and retain the moisture, so that a reasonable number of them contribute to fertility. Even so afflictions tend to our good. "The beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee." That is, God is able when he will to restrain even the natural wrath of our bitterest enemies. "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Thus, in submission to God, the end will be that a man's house and field are safe. "Thy habitation" or flock shall be safe, and thou shalt not suffer disappointment. Thy family shall be prosperous and numerous, and in the end thou shalt come to the grave as a ripe shock of corn is lifted from the field and carried to the garner. In a word, the lesson is "that all things work together for good to them that love God." Let us accept him in all his dispensations, and let us not fight against him.

XVI.

JOB'S APPEAL TO GOD.—Job xxiii, 1-10.

(1) Then Job answered and said, (2) Even to day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. (3) Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! (4) I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. (5) I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. (6) Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me. (7) There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my Judge. (8) Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: (9) On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: (10) But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.—Job xxiii, 1-10.

Through all the intervening chapters the battle between Job and his friends had raged without ceasing. On their part they contended for their dogmatic creed—that rewards and punishments were meted out *in this world*; that sin brought with it in this life its terrible consequences, and that virtue was sure to be vindicated in a corresponding compensation of blessing. Because Job was so sorely afflicted, they argued, over and over again, that he must be a great sinner. It is true that they could point out no sin of which he had been guilty, but they argued that there must be sin or there could not be such affliction. To admit that such affliction could find a place in a good man's life would argue the injustice of God, which neither Job nor his friends would admit. The difference between Job's position and theirs was, that while he stoutly upheld the absolute justice of God, he as stoutly denied iniquity in himself, and maintained his integrity. These two positions, with his unparalleled afflictions between, seemed inconsistent with each other. The friends seized on this inconsistency, and pounded Job with arguments drawn from the theology which they both held. Job, on the other hand, still maintaining his integrity and the justice of God, admitted that in the present case God was an "adversary" to him for some inexplicable reason, but that it did not arise from any fault of his. The friends contended that such a position was insulting to God and blasphemous in Job, and that his stubbornness in maintaining his integrity was only an aggravation of his sin. In

the course of the argument, which must have lasted over many days, we notice that the friends intrench themselves more and more behind dogma, steadily lose their calmness, and grow bitter, unjust, and vindictive against Job. Foiled in their efforts to convince him of sin, and to bring him to their views on the matter, they assail him most bitterly, and seem more bent on maintaining their creed than in justifying God. On the other hand, Job, still overwhelmed with his afflictions, utterly unable to comprehend the meaning of them, confident of his integrity (which is the only thing he absolutely knows), and equally confident of the ultimate justice of God, draws still nearer and nearer to God, appeals to him for vindication against his friends, and even against his own dealings with him. This is one of the remarkable features of Job's argument. God had done him a great wrong, but to God he appeals to undo that wrong. He has such an uncompromising conviction of the justice of God that he appeals to that against the wrong which God himself had done to him. In all his argument and outcries his face is toward God and his appeal to God. He will listen to no one else, argue with no one else, and look to no one else for vindication. "My friends scorn me: but mine eye poureth out tears unto God." (xvi, 20.) He is often very bold in his appeals to God. "Thou knowest that I am not wicked; and there is none that can deliver out of thine hand." (x, 7.) "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him. He also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before him." (xiii, 15-17.) A conscious sinner would not dare approach into God's presence; but Job longs for nothing so much as for the privilege of facing God and requiring of him an explanation and justification of his ways with him. If God be just and he be innocent, then God must vindicate him. This he constantly argues, entreats, and demands. Another thing is apparent in the course of the whole argument, and that is, that Job is gradually changing his theological views and reaching conclusions from the premise of his own sufferings which were not in his creed at the beginning. He is no longer sure that suffering is the necessary consequence of sinning—that is, that his afflictions are traceable to iniquity in himself. How could he hold fast by that old view when he was conscious that there was no iniquity in him—that is, no such iniquity as that attributed to him, being inferred from his sufferings. Then, again, he was beginning to perceive that the sphere of God's providence and the working of his ways were not to be limited to this world. He suggests that God should let him die and hide him in "hades" (or the grave) until such

time as he was ready to vindicate him and bring forth his righteousness. He promises to rest quietly in that middle world until God's time should come, and then at his first call he would respond. (xiv, 13-15.) God has more worlds than this in which to make his ways plain, his promises good, and his justice manifest. This new and open vision of a future life and of the arbitration of human affairs beyond the confines of this life rises to its culminating point in the nineteenth chapter, where he bursts out with that grand declaration of faith: "I know that my Redeemer" (my Kinsman and Avenger) "liveth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet out of my flesh shall I see God." Job had reached a state of both body and mind when he despaired of recovery of the one and the peace of the other in an earthly vindication, and he longed for death—not as once he had done, in bitterness, wishing that he had never been born, or that death might be annihilation to him, but that in another world his Redeemer might vindicate him. He had nothing more to live for. His body was being eaten to the bone with the foul leprosy that covered his skin; his friends had forsaken him; he was the object of their bitter injustice; his wife had turned from him; and he was the object of loathing on all hands, and of the foulest suspicions. Not only was he adjudged to be guilty of unknown crimes, but now, because he maintained his integrity, he was pronounced to be a monumental hypocrite and even a blasphemer, because, being guilty (as adjudged), he appealed to God for vindication, and charged him with visiting these afflictions upon him without a cause. He is growing quiet in the increasing conviction that in another world he will be vindicated. He had lost all hope for this one.

In the twenty-second chapter, which is the second one in the last colloquy, we see the Temanite throwing his last spear, firing his last arrow. Like the cuttle-fish, he strikes this blow and then retires amid a cloud of filth which he pours over Job. In vain had they sought to convict Job of crimes, or point out to him one single sin which he had committed. Yet their theory of sin and its punishment required that sin be found in Job. "According to our theory you *ought to be* a sinner. We cannot change our theory. Therefore you *are* a sinner. And since your afflictions are unparalleled, you must be an unparalleled sinner." Thus they reasoned, thus practically Eliphaz spoke. They had been unable to pierce Job's armor of integrity by all the arts of argument, by all the cunning of insinuation; so now the Temanite resorts to a last desperate charge. Without proof or scrap of evidence, he opens his batteries, and

charged Job with every heinous sin, every namable iniquity of which the worst wretch could be guilty (xxii), and then calls upon him to repent of these crimes which he had not committed, and turn to God, confess his sins, and God will forgive him, lift him up, and cause him to prosper again. He in this uses a very devil's argument, and presses upon him outward deliverance from suffering and outward prosperity as a bribe. (xxii, 23-30.) But to all this Job pays little attention. He answers, indeed, but he does not rebut these gross charges brought against him. He has practically turned away from man. The argument between him and his friends has been thrashed out, and he is more and more disposed to turn the whole matter over to God for judgment and vindication. He is rather relieved at the open charges, or the charges of open sins and crimes, for these could be more easily met than their former insinuations of secret sins and iniquities. A specific charge is always more easily met than an insinuation.

I.—JOB'S LONGING DESIRE AFTER GOD.

“Then Job answered and said.” But he said but one word to his whilome friends, and then turned in a kind of soliloquy toward God. To his friends he remarked: “Even to-day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning.” He admits that his complaint has been bitter; that he has given way under stress of suffering, both mental and physical, to bitter reproaches. He had been hot against his friends, and angry with them because they had misjudged him and accused him of sins and crimes of which he was innocent, of a secret character for sin of which he was guiltless; he had even spoken bitter and hard words to and of God, though under all these he has considered God his true and only refuge. But all his words and all his bitter complaints had fallen short of the heavy stroke that was upon him. “My stroke is heavier than my groaning.” Having said this, he turns away from these friends and addresses himself to himself in soliloquy.

1. “**Oh that I knew where I might find him!**”—We have before remarked that in all this trial Job had been drawn steadily toward God. He had a deep conviction in it all, though he could not reconcile the justice of God with his dealings, that God after all was his sure refuge in this time of trouble. In the ninth chapter, at verse thirty-three, Job is feeling after an advocate or daysman who might stand between him and God. He felt the need of some such humanized mediator, for he was conscious of *sinfulness* though

not of *crimes*. In the nineteenth chapter he asserts his conviction that there is such a Daysman, even an avenging Kinsman who will ultimately take up his cause. But here we find him yearning and longing for God. Friendless in this world, weary with his own life, overwhelmed with afflictions without a cause, he longs to find God and lay himself at his feet, and cast all his care and trouble upon him. He is not afraid of God. He would press up to the very foot of the throne, and there urge his suit. Most people in certain times of great spiritual need or mental anxiety know something of this longing to find God. That God is, that our only hope is in him, that he is somehow ready to help even though we be sinners, is a conviction that the soul cannot rid itself of if it would. And yet where is God to be found? We are reminded of the purpose of the Spouse in the Song of Solomon: "I will seek him whom my soul loveth." "Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?" (Song iii, 2, 3.) "Master, where dwellest thou?" (John i, 38) was the question of the two disciples who followed Jesus. They were longing for an interview with him, but knew not where they might find him. He is not in the works of nature, that is, as we discern him there he does not enter into our deep spiritual need. He is not in our speculative philosophies. He is not to be found in our creeds and dogmas. Job had already found out how unsatisfactory his old dogmatic faith was. No! the God whom Job was seeking was he whom, out of this furnace of affliction, he was for the first time beginning to discern as one to whom he might go, and throw himself upon and claim some kind of dependence.

2. "I would order my cause before him."—He was weary of the strife of tongues and the battle of words with men. He had found out that man could not or would not understand. God only could meet his want. God only was just enough and strong enough at once to know his innocence and vindicate it. He had every confidence in God. He was sure of his integrity. He would set forth all his complaint in order. He would keep nothing back, nor would he overstate his case. "I would . . . fill my mouth with arguments." Not only would he set the facts before him, but he would bring arguments to bear. "I would argue the case from the very justice and goodness of God. I would make the holiness of his character and the equity of his government my plea." Thus would Job do in the peculiar circumstances of his case. We also would come before God and fill our mouth with arguments, though we have nothing to plead but sin on our part, and nothing to urge but mercy and grace on his part. We have thousands of promises and gracious

declarations made to and concerning sinners which would furnish us with abundant arguments. God in Christ is the God to whom we will venture with our cause, and ply with our arguments—arguments with which he himself has furnished us.

3. "I would know the words which he would answer me."—Job had listened to the words which men had answered him, and they neither instructed nor comforted him, neither did they convict him of sin. He was weary of man's words and man's judgment. It mattered little to him what man's judgment was. What he now longed for was to hear what God had to say and what his judgment was. Like Paul, he knew nothing against himself; yet was he not hereby justified. He that judged him was the Lord. (I. Cor. iv, 4.) "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." (Ps. xix, 9, 10.) God is justified when he speaks and clear when he judges (Ps. li, 4), therefore he would not be afraid to plead his cause there, nor to hear the judgment of God. Let it be remembered that it was not the cause of sinlessness but only the cause of his "integrity with God" which had been called in question by his afflictions and the harsh judgments of his friends. With us, we draw near to God, confident of his mercy even while confessing our sins.

4. "Will he plead against me?"—The question arises in his mind as to whether he would desire or expect that God would exercise his omnipotence against him. In thus coming into the presence of God, and casting himself upon him, might he not be invoking his great power and stirring up God's irresistible strength against him? It is not in defiance that he would come before God, to provoke him either with hypocrisy, deceit, or haughty independence. Nor would he come on a general plea that he was without sin. All through the book Job has freely confessed his sinfulness as a man. It was only the particular alleged cause of his afflictions which he denied, and in the face of which charges he maintained his integrity. "No," says Job, "instead of pleading with or against me with his great power, he will put strength in me. He will encourage me; and whereas I could not stand before him if he were against me, he will so uphold me that I may plead with him and maintain my cause." This was his confidence. With us, we are strong in our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we come either for forgiveness of sins or strength to help us in every time of need.

5. "There the righteous might dispute with him."—The meaning seems to be, that if only he might find God and get his cause

before him, he would not only listen to him patiently, strengthen him in his cause, but declare him righteous in the face of his accusers, and grant him an everlasting deliverance from their calumnies. If God should justify him, who then could condemn him? His case was the same as the believer's as he stands before God's bar of judgment clothed in the righteousness and strength of Christ. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." (Rom. viii, 33, 34.) Job stood on his integrity in the matter in controversy, but we have no integrity to stand on, that is, not of our own; but standing in Christ and his righteousness, we can make the same plea with God which Job, being innocent of transgression, made.

II.—JOB'S VAIN SEARCH.

Job longed to know where he might find God, in order that he might lay his cause before him. He was confident that in such a case he would be vindicated. He was not afraid of such a trial; but, alas, it was not to be. He could not find him. "Thou art a God that hides thyself." So Job found.

1. "I cannot see him."—Job was profoundly convinced of the existence and nearness of God. He longed to come into some conscious presence with him, and yet God eluded his search. If he went forward or toward the East, he was not there; if he went backward or toward the west, he could not perceive him. On the left hand or in the north, where he did his chiefest work, but there he could not behold him; and on the right hand or in the west he hid himself or veiled his presence, so that he could not see him. We long for sensible evidences of God's presence, but such sensible evidence is not given. We are convinced that God is round about us, and not far from any one of us, but we cannot locate his presence in any particular place. We cannot, as it were, lay our hand on him. God is not to be apprehended by the senses of the body, but by faith. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb. xi, 6.) "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John iv, 24.) This spiritual pathway which leads to God is by Jesus Christ, who said: "No man cometh unto the Father but by me"; and who further declared himself to be "the Way" to God and to life. Men miss finding God who look for him in the east,

west, north, and south, in the stars, in the things that grow upon the earth, and in the rocks. God is everywhere at work, and yet always veiling himself from the carnal eyes. The little child knows where to find him, and the pure in heart shall see him, and all they that are born of God.

2. **“But he knoweth the way that I take.”**—Though Job could not find God, he had this consolation, that God had found *him* and knew his way, that is, the way of his thoughts and of his life; in fact, he knew him altogether. In this would he rest until further light should come to him. It seems to have been the culminating point of Job's submission to God, until God himself spoke to him. This kind of surrender to God is most helpful. It is not our knowledge of God, but his knowledge of us, that makes us safe, trusting him. It is not our love toward him, but his love toward us, that comforts us and makes us confident. It is not that we hold on to him, but that he holds on to us, that secures us from falling and guarantees our final presentation in glory. (Jude 24.)

3. **Coming forth as gold.**—It is a wonderful fact in the history of Job's trial that he never lost confidence in God. He was perfectly confident in his own integrity, and also in the justice of God. The present dealing was upsetting to his theory, but even that he was ready to give up, in the face of the two things he was absolutely sure of. His confidence is nowhere more perfectly shown than in this declaration of his. It also reveals the fact that he was getting a glimpse of a truth which he had not at first perceived, and which was entirely new to the theological thought of his day, viz.: that afflictions might have another use than that of punishment; they might come for the purpose of culture and the assaying of character. “When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” Here he had risen to the apprehension of the truth in its highest form as set forth by both Peter and James. “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations (trials): that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire.” (I. Pet. i, 6, 7.) Godly character will bear fire more severely kindled than gold. Gold, after all, is perishable, but godly character is imperishable. “Blessed,” therefore, “is the man that endureth temptation (trials): for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” (James i, 12.)

XVII.

JOB'S CONFESSION AND RESTORATION.—Job xlii, 1-10.

(1) Then Job answered the Lord, and said, (2) I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. (3) Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. (4) Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. (5) I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: (6) Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. (7) And it was so, that after the Lord had spoken these words unto Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath. (8) Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job. (9) So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according as the Lord commanded them: the Lord also accepted Job. (10) And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.—Job xlii, 1-10.

We have reached the conclusion of this greatest of all poems in ancient literature, if not in all literature, ancient or modern. It has been our chief difficulty, in making three or four brief studies from this wonderful poem, that it has been impossible for us to follow the argument from the beginning to the end and thus place our particular studies in their proper setting. It would have been easy to comment on the many beautiful sayings both of Job and his friends, treating them apart from their context; but we have sought to preserve the integrity of the argument of the whole book. It is one of the remarkable features of this poem that the three friends of Job, whom God declared to have not spoken rightly of him, nevertheless have spoken some of the truest and sublimest truths known to us. Their error was that they spoke truth, but wrongly applied it. Just as Satan spoke truth when he said to Christ, tempting him to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple: "It is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against

a stone." The Scripture quoted was a true and beautiful one, and the promise therein contained, a most precious one; but the application of the promise to the circumstances under which Christ was then placed was most base and satanic. Jesus saw the fraud and exposed it. In this way Job's friends urged upon him in argument splendid truths, but they were truths which did not apply to his circumstances, and, being urged and pressed to carry a false position, these sublime truths became false arguments.

We have seen how the argument between Job and his friends came to a natural end, both for the reason that they had exhausted it and that the friends failed utterly to move Job from his position, because he was guiltless of the things charged and insinuated against him, on account of which they claimed that the calamities of God had come upon him. Job was absolutely sure of his integrity, and so could not be by any argument persuaded into a confession. The friends were sure from their premises that such afflictions only came from certain causes. The difference between the "sureness" of the two parties was that Job knew that he was innocent, while the friends only inferred that he was guilty. Throughout the whole course of the debate the three friends grew more haughty, hard, bitter, and unfeelingly unjust toward Job. Toward the end Zophar, the most narrow-minded of the three, dropped out of the argument altogether, and Eliphaz, the wisest and ablest of them all, resorted at last, with an utter loss of temper, to open charges against Job for which he had not the slightest proof or evidence. According to his theory, Job ought to have been guilty of these crimes, therefore he was guilty of them. It never occurred to him that his theory might be wrong. On the other hand, Job, starting with the same theology as that held by his friends, yet knowing that in his case the theory did not hold good, steadily drew nearer to God, accusing him at times of injustice, assuming that afflictions were only visited where there were transgressions calling for them, and yet having such unshaken confidence in his justice that he called upon him to defend and vindicate himself against his own injustice. There is a sublime reverence in this attitude toward God. His hard speeches and his seemingly almost blasphemous charges against God grew out of his profound conviction of God's absolute righteousness. He felt that his afflictions were not so much a reproach to him as to God, for they laid God under the suspicion of being unjust. We have seen also that the dilemma in which Job found himself between his afflictions and his absolute confidence in God drove him little by little to suspect that his theol-

ogy had been too narrow, and that God might have other modes of procedure than those which he and his friends had conceived.

The arguments between Job and his friends were brought to a summary conclusion by the appearance of a fifth party in the field. Elihu, a younger man than any of them, had during the controversy sat as a silent listener. He perceived the mistake of both Job and his friends. Indeed, he seems to have had an inspired revelation of the truth concerning the whole matter, and after a while he could restrain himself no longer, but broke forth into speech: "Then was kindled the wrath of Elihu: . . . against Job was his wrath kindled, because he justified himself rather than God. Also against his three friends was his wrath kindled, because they had found no answer" (that is, to Job), "and yet had condemned Job." (xxxii, 2, 3.) Elihu had seized on the very root of the matter on both sides. He condenses in two brief sentences the pith of the elaborate discussion contained in twenty-nine chapters. There never can be a true answer from these three men: Experience, Tradition, and Legality. God only can answer the unbroken heart and explain the mystery of his own acts, or rather mode of action, in the moral world.

After Elihu had spoken and finished, then God himself speaks to Job out of the whirlwind, and calls upon him to answer before him. He convicts Job of folly in attempting to judge of the character of God and of the correctness and righteousness of his proceedings with men, when he is not able even to understand the working of his power in the external world. If he is not able to penetrate the outer fringes of his works, how can he presume to understand the deep mysteries involved in his relations to man as a moral and spiritual being, whom he has made in his own image and destined to be his companion forever? "Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him?" At the words of the Lord Job bowed himself down in humility. "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further." (xl, 1-5.)

I.—JOB HUMBLLED BEFORE THE LORD.

When the Lord had finally answered Job and convinced him of his folly in attempting to criticise his dealing with him, Job was abashed and truly humbled. He was so far in sympathy with God, had such trust in him, and such a real comprehension of the essential attribute of his being, that is, his absolute justice, that it was

easy for him to understand what God said to him, and to perceive how and where he had been mistaken—not in answering his friends, but in presuming to arraign and pass judgment on the action of the Lord himself.

1. Job's confession.—"I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee." He had learned his lesson. When God caused to pass before Job's mental eye the wonders of his creation, and called upon him to answer if he could understand and explain the mysteries underlying his work in the physical world, including those of life and created being, he further asked him how then he could expect to understand God himself? How had he dared to sit in judgment upon the Almighty when he could not even understand his works? Job sees the force of this argument and humbly acknowledges the omnipotence of God. "I know that thou canst do *everything*." A view of the omnipotence of God in all the breadth, length, depth, and height of it, not only in the outward creation itself as revealing it in part, but in the wonderful rule which God maintains through and over it all, tends to humble the pride of man before him. Job was now feeling how insignificant a creature he was compared with God, and was also beginning to see how daring he had been in presuming to criticise the Almighty. Not only did he get a view of his own littleness in this mirror of God's omnipotence, but he also saw another thing, namely, God's omniscience. "And that no thought can be hidden from thee." He realized now that God had read him through and through, and knew all his thoughts as he could not know himself. He had already had some glimpses of himself which he had hitherto not seen, and now he was losing that self-confidence which had been more or less present with him throughout all his contention with his friends. He was now approaching the position of the Psalmist, who said, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me." (Ps. cxxxi, 1.) A while ago he had longed to find God and come into his presence and order his suit before his very throne. He thought to tell God all about himself, as though God did not know. He was greatly cast down because he could not find God; because God eluded his search and veiled himself from his eyes. He, however, had comforted himself with the growing conviction that God knew him and understood him thoroughly. Now, since God had searched him out and spoken to him, he was humbled as never before, and was ready to say: "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me, . . . and art acquainted with all my ways. For there

is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. . . . Such knowledge is too wonderful for me ; it is high, I cannot attain unto it." (Ps. cxxxix, 1-6.) Man is naturally conceited, and is apt to think what *he* does not know is not worth knowing. This vicious habit of the haughty human mind is nowhere displayed with such lamentable presumption as when man sits in judgment upon the Almighty and his ways. There be things which we do not understand, and ways with God that are past our finding out ; but to presume, therefore, that they are wrong or unwise is only to expose our own ignorance and pride, and bring us in guilty of presumption.

2. "**I am the man.**"—God had challenged Job with these words: "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" (xxxviii, 2.) And before God had spoken, Elihu had twice charged this folly upon Job: "Job hath spoken without knowledge, and his words were without wisdom." "Therefore doth Job open his mouth in vain: he multiplieth words without knowledge." (xxxiv, 35; xxxv, 16.) That is, with an insufficient knowledge of God, Job had presumed to sit in judgment upon his ways ; and without a sufficient knowledge, even with the best intentions, to pass judgments is to veil counsel with words. Job sees this now, and in answer to God he takes the words out of his mouth and applied them to himself. God had said, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel with words without knowledge?" Job answers: "I am the man." He does not join his friends with himself and say they, too, were guilty (perhaps even more so than himself). God was dealing with Job, and Job bravely stood by himself before God and regarded not others in the trial. "I am that man, Lord, who hath darkened counsel with words without knowledge." "Therefore have I uttered that I understood not: things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." He humbly confesses that he had presumed to express judgments upon subjects upon which he was not competent to judge because his knowledge of them was insufficient. This mind is that which approaches unto conversion. It is the mind of a little child that does not pretend to knowledge, and not that of the wise and prudent who pretends to all knowledge, and therefore only succeeds in demonstrating himself to be a fool, besides throwing a veil over true knowledge and darkening the subject under discussion as well as his own foolish heart.

3. **Job's humility.**—God had challenged Job to stand still while he questioned him. "Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me." (xxxviii, 3; xl, 6.)

In answer, now, to that challenge twice given him, Job replies in almost the same language, thus showing how fully he recognized the discipline of instruction which he had received from God. "Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me." That is, in answer to the Lord's challenge, he seeks and demands attention from God while he speaks in answer to that challenge. And what is his answer? "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eyes see thee." That is, "Hitherto I have judged of thee by what I have heard of thee. This, indeed, was enough to compel my glad fear and reverence, and even when thou wast dealing with me in a way I could not understand and that seemed like injustice to me, still I had such a conception of thy character that I believed that thou wouldst vindicate thyself from the very charge I made against thee. But now I have come to know thee, as it were, by the sight of mine eyes, for myself, and not through report. Thou hast revealed thyself to me and shown me how much greater thou art than I have conceived; how narrow and superficial my knowledge of thee was; and how narrow and mistaken and vain my ideas were of myself. The result of all this is that I am humbled in the dust before thee. A little while ago when thou wast talking with me I got a view of my vileness (xl, 4), but now I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." This was Job's answer to God. It must not be supposed, however, that Job here confesses to those sins and horrible crimes which his three friends had charged against him—that he had at last surrendered his consciousness of innocence and his "integrity," which he had been fighting for so desperately against his friends and even with God. The confession he now makes is rather of the sins he had been guilty of *since* his afflictions had come upon him, namely, those of accusing God of injustice in dealing with him without a cause, and generally presuming to pass judgment on the Almighty. His littleness, his general vileness, the horrid presumptuousness of many of his declarations, were overwhelming him with a sense of shame. On the point of general sinfulness he had made frequent confessions before his friends. He had never contended that he was innocent of any sin, but only of those special and peculiar offenses, heinous and desperate, of which his friends had accused him in order to account for his sore afflictions. Perhaps he had been somewhat self-righteous, and accounted the perfection and uprightness, his godly fear, and the absence from his life of evil which God had ascribed to him, to be the natural outgrowth of his own character. He had already begun to get such glimpses of him-

self and of God as to have led him to suspect that even his goodness was one of the wonderful works of God, that, in fact, whatever of goodness there was in him was just the goodness of God shining in and through him. (xxviii, 28.) At any rate, Job is completely humbled before God, and is ready, not unwillingly, to take his place in dust and ashes before his feet. Bold as he had been to maintain his integrity in the matters charged against him (and as he would be again), yet now in the general view of himself which he had gotten from a sight of the Lord, he could say only, as did Peter, falling at the feet of Christ: "I am a sinful man."

II.—THE CONDEMNATION OF THE FRIENDS.

Having dealt with Job for his unwisdom and foolish presumption, God now turns to the three friends, already silenced by the words of Elihu, and speaks to them. He speaks to Eliphaz the Temanite, as being the oldest of the three, the wisest of them, and their natural leader. "My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath."

1. Presumptuous knowledge.—The question arises as to how it is that God should condemn these friends and justify Job as to their several speeches. They had spoken "wrongly," but Job had spoken "rightly." And yet God himself had charged Job with having darkened counsel with unwise words. The difference between Job's speeches and theirs was in this. Job had spoken unwisely, he had dared to criticise, censure, and condemn whatever in the dealings of God had seemed unjust and wrong to him; but in it all he had stoutly contended that God was so just that he could not do wrong finally, and that if needs be he would even clear God as against himself. (xvi, 21.) If he had charged God with injustice, he had appealed to the very justice of God to set him right, and he had such confidence in God that he never doubted that his truth would finally appear, even if it should not come out except in another world. In this confidence he was utterly willing to die, and even lie long ages in "hades" and wait till God should call him forth. In all this Job highly honored God. His sins were such as grew out of his high ideas of God, not being educated to full knowledge of God. On the other hand, the three friends, and especially Zophar, who was a narrow dogmatist, had assumed to speak for God as though he were altogether such as they were themselves. They assumed that their theory of evil and punishment was the right

one; and then they put God into their small measure and interpreted him authoritatively, and spoke as though they had authority, and that it must be so with God since they thought so. "If Job had condemned God to clear himself (xl, 8) they had condemned Job to clear God. And whereas they had spoken sincerely, they had paltered with their consciences and forced themselves to believe that Job *must* have sinned, rather than admit that there was more in the moral government of God than their theology had dreamed of." Job had caught some glimpse of this spirit in them as early as the thirteenth chapter. "Will ye speak wickedly for God? and talk deceitfully for him?" (xiii, 7.) Therefore God condemned these friends while he accepted the person of Job, especially after his deep humility and penitence.

2. Atonement appointed for the friends.—God was justly angry with the three friends for their misinterpretations of himself and their determined misjudgment of Job, and appointed an atonement to be made for their sin. It is most remarkable that in this they were required to call upon the very man whom they had denounced as being the vilest of all vile sinners on the earth to act as priest and intercessor for them. This was a bitter humiliation to them. Yet God insists, saying: "For him (Job) I will accept," that is, I will hear his prayers in your behalf. He warned them that if they failed to make this atonement and cast themselves on the intercession of Job he "would deal with them after their folly," reminding them again of their sin. It is to the credit of the three men that they humbly took their places as sinners before God, and made their confession, as it were, to Job, and accepted his intercession on their behalf. It was a bitter dose for them, but then sin is a desperate disease, and requires a bitter remedy. So they "went and did according as the Lord commanded them. The Lord also accepted Job." This, I think, further implies that Job offered an atonement for himself also. Perhaps they all offered together and Job officiated as priest for them all, they making their confession through him.

III.—JOB'S CAPTIVITY TURNED.

It is interesting to note that the turning-point in Job's history and affairs was his forgiveness of his friends who had so bitterly outraged him. It was "when he prayed for his friends" that the captivity of Job was turned.

1. The healing of his body.—I suppose the minute the forgiveness went out of his heart and up to God through his prayer for

his friends, then divine healing went forth on Job's body, and the leprosy left him, and "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child."

2. His reinstatement in possessions.—Not only did Job receive the healing of the body, but God reinstated him in all his wealth. Yea, he gave him "twice as much as he had before," and the same number of children as he had lost (which, with those whom he had taken to heaven, would make double in this respect), as well as in wealth and flocks and herds.

XVIII.

WISDOM'S WARNING.—Proverbs i, 20-33.

(20) Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: (21) She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, (22) How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? (23) Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. (24) Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; (25) But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: (26) I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; (27) When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. (28) Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: (29) For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: (30) They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. (31) Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. (32) For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. (33) But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.—Proverbs i, 20-33.

Solomon was the wisest man in the world. His wisdom was largely the gift of God in answer to his wise prayer. (II. Chron. i, 10.) Yet he must from the beginning have been wise to ask such a gift. In the days of his splendor he gathered about him a company of wise men, who gave themselves up to pious study. He was the wisest of them all (I. Kings iv, 29-32) and like a magnet he drew to his side a whole host of men who were fairly his peers. They set themselves the task of inquiring into the secret of all things, and opening to the world the wisdom of God. Solomon is said to have spoken "three thousand proverbs," and "his songs were a thousand and five." These many proverbs which he spake covered almost every department of knowledge, and were drawn from his extensive observation of nature, as well as of men. "He spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom." (I. Kings iv, 33, 34.) Solomon lived and spake his wisdom five hundred

years before the "seven wise men" of Greece, and seven hundred years before Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. It is most likely that the wisdom of this great school which Solomon founded became known through the various dispersions of the Jews to the wise men of the west, and that they drew much of their wisdom from this divinely inspired source. Of the "three thousand proverbs" spoken by Solomon only comparatively few have been preserved to us, and they are gathered into this book. These are they which bear upon the ethical relations and duties of man, and have evidently been selected from the great mass of his other wise sayings because of this peculiarity. The Bible is not a book compiled with a view to giving secular instruction, but for the purpose of leading men to God, and therefore to a true knowledge of him and his will concerning us. This book has been called "Wisdom for this World," but it is essentially wisdom for both worlds; for it is certain that if we do not get wisdom for *this* world we shall not have it for the world to come. The word of God is able to make us wise unto salvation, and whatever falls short of that mark is of no essential use to man.

There are several things which are of importance for us to know in studying the Proverbs of Solomon. (i) It is remarkable, as is the Book of Job, for the absence from it of all reference to the Sabbath and those ceremonials which are peculiar to the religion and writings of the Jews. The story of Job (which was probably written in the same period of time that gave birth to the Proverbs, but was based upon a history which was enacted before the days of Moses) also shows knowledge of God and teaching concerning him which is unassociated with the Jewish ritual and ceremonial. (ii) In this book, as well as in Job, we are taught that the scope of religion is much wider than that which is bound by ceremonial, and that the wisdom of God is for all men, and not alone for the peculiar people to whom he committed the early oracles. It is essentially catholic in its teaching, and deals with those principles of religion which are common to the nature of all men. In many respects it is anticipatory of the Gospel, and agrees in its teachings with what Paul says of the relation of God to all men, both Jews and Gentiles. The Jews indeed are judged *by* the law, but the Gentiles, "without the law." (Rom. ii, 14, 15.) The Proverbs and their teachings are directed to the religious nature of man, whether he be Jew or Gentile. "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." This is the motto or text of the whole book, and suggests to us that the reverence and awe of God, which is by nature rooted in the consciousness of all men, is the basis of all religious life; and to that God

appeals. The teaching of the book is, as we have said, essentially ethical, and the constant reference to the name of Jehovah shows both its Hebrew origin and the great truth that mere morality (or infidel ethics) is not acceptable or sufficient for man. No morality or ethical life which does not spring out of the "fear of Jehovah" will lift man out of the littleness and weakness of his own nature or deliver him from the downward tendencies of the sin which has entered into his life. Morality *without* God is the attempt of man to lift himself out of himself without fulcrum; whereas morality *with* God gives to man Jehovah himself as his lever.

The first six verses of the book constitute the introduction to the whole. They were probably written by another hand than that of Solomon. Though they ascribe the whole book to him, it is done on the same principle that we ascribe the Psalms to David, because he was the principal writer of them. We know from the book itself that parts of it were written by other hands, *e. g.*, the last two chapters, which are ascribed respectively to Agur and Lemuel the king. Certain portions of the book were not written out and arranged until the days of Hezekiah, who caused his scholars to gather up and incorporate the portion under this section with the rest of the sayings, (xxv, 1.) The first nine chapters represent connected discourse, and it is probably the sublimest portion of the whole. These chapters should be read as such, and not as disconnected and fragmentary proverbs.

I.—THE PREACHING OF WISDOM.

The great address contained in the first nine chapters is introduced by the text: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." This truth is repeated over and over again and fully expanded in the eighth chapter, which is a larger statement of the truths more briefly stated here. (viii, 20 ff.) "Wisdom" is the first and mightiest of the many words which the preacher piles up in the beginning of his discourse, in order to bring out the completeness of his thought and teaching. In the eighth chapter he personifies this word, and henceforth speaks of wisdom as we would of Jesus Christ. There is no doubt but that the ultimate reference of this word is to our Lord, who is essentially the "Wisdom of God." (John i, 1; I. Cor. i, 30; Col. ii, 3.) Wisdom has been defined "as the power by which human personality reaches its highest spiritual perfection, by which all lower elements are brought into harmony with the highest," and therefore "can hardly be thought

of as other than personal, life-giving, creative." The student should carefully read the eighth chapter in connection with this portion. The twenty-eighth of Job is also suggested.

1. God will have all men to be saved.—The wisdom of the Greeks (and, indeed, of all the ancients except the Hebrews) was reserved for the learned, and was taught in the small academies and higher schools *for* and *to* the learned only. This was because with them wisdom was speculative and not personal. It was treated as the outgrowth of man's own intellect, and not the revelation of the personal and loving God. Here we may understand, with our fuller and larger light, that by "wisdom" is meant the revelation of God which had its highest expression in our Lord Jesus Christ. "And the Word" (Wisdom of God) "was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." (John i, 14.) "Wisdom crieth without." "Go ye into all the world and preach wisdom to every creature," "for God will have all men to be saved." Therefore, Jesus, as the great Teacher and Redeemer of men, is testified to all, in due time. (I. Tim. ii, 1-7.) The Gospel is "to bring all men unto the obedience of faith." (Rom. i, 5.) "She uttereth her voice in the streets." Here wisdom is spoken of as being feminine in gender; but in the original the word is plural in form, and perhaps suggests to us the fullness of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, all uniting in their entreaty to men to cease from the folly of sin, and learn the wisdom of holiness and life. We can almost see in these words the picture of our Lord Jesus Christ preaching and teaching in the streets, by the wayside, in the houses of the people, in the Temple, and in the synagogues—"in the chief places of concourse, in the openings of the gates, in the city," where the masses of the people dwell—as in later times the apostles, being filled with the Spirit of wisdom, went everywhere preaching the Gospel, on the Sabbaths in the synagogues, and between the Sabbaths in the market-places. (Acts xvii, 17.) We have a vivid picture of Wisdom "crying," in that scene which shows us Jesus "in the last day, the great day of the feast," standing and crying: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." (John vii, 37.) We ought to learn this lesson, that the Gospel is to be preached everywhere and to all people, and not to be shut up in certain "consecrated places," as though it were too exclusive for common people, and might only be heard under restricted and limited conditions. Jesus taught the woman of Samaria, and through her all men, that "neither in this mountain nor yet at Jeru-

saalem" shall men "worship the Father" (John iv, 21), but in every place where the Spirit can come.

2. Wisdom's entreaty.—The attitude of Wisdom toward men is that of tender entreaty and solemn exhortation. God is most earnest in his desire that "all men should be saved." Three classes of men are addressed. (i) "Ye simple ones." Those thoughtless and careless people who lay themselves easily open to all the temptations which come upon men; the heedless, gay, pleasure-loving people, who take no thought for the morrow of their lives, but give themselves up to every passing influence, without consideration; that vast mass of people whom we see everywhere floating down the current of this world without an attempt to stem the tide of their natural and lower inclinations, whose only thought seems to be to "eat, drink, and be merry," with the things of this world and for the space of this life only. There is surprise expressed at the length of time they have given themselves up to this course of folly. During a certain period God seems to give men up to their own courses, as though both his goodness and their own folly would surely bring them to repentance; but after a time he speaks out and "commandeth all men everywhere to repent." (Acts xvii, 30.) A beautiful parallel to this passage, "How long will ye love simplicity?" is found in Isaiah lv, 2: "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." There is infinite tenderness in this entreaty. (ii) "The scorers." These are they who, rising out of simplicity or mere thoughtlessness, seem to take delight in "mocking at all the good which God would bring to them." They scoff at religion as though it were not worthy either of their "great minds," or worth wasting their precious time and talents upon. These are they who say religion "is good enough for women and children," but not for them. They assume many rôles. Sometimes they become scientific, and say that it is impossible that there should be any revelation, even if there be a God at all. Sometimes they become indignant and denounce religion as something which comes to dwarf the mind of man and reduce him to a bondage of superstition, which they proudly reject on the plea of maintaining their "moral and intellectual freedom." They "delight in their scorning." The entreaty to them is tinged with a harsher tone, and there is a latent sarcasm in it; yet God will have "all men to be saved," even the scorner; and so he speaks to them as well as to the simple. (iii) The "fools" who "hate knowledge."

These are they who have become obstinate in their conceit, perverse and bitter in their rejection of the truth which they have despised; such as say in their hearts: "There is no God" (Ps. xiv, 1); who, "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." (Rom. i, 22.) Vain in their own imaginations, their foolish hearts have become "darkened" by the sins which they have loved, and which they would not surrender in order to obtain the wisdom of God that maketh "wise unto salvation," and purifies and ennobles the life. These are the worldly fools who stake all their happiness on the possessions and pleasures of this life. (Luke xii, xvi.)

3. Wisdom's exhortation.—So good is God, and so merciful and long-suffering, that he still strives with all classes of sinners, and will not leave them so long as there is any possibility of winning them. "Turn ye at my reproof." Here is counsel of the best kind. God reproves sinners, but only in order that he may win them from sin. His reproofs are all given in mercy. His reproofs are those of a father who loves, and not of an enemy who flings forth bitter words of hatred. The first office of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus sent into the world to continue his work among men, is to "reprove the world of sin." (John xvi, 8, 9.) Along with this reproof, which is full of heavenly argument, there is a most gracious promise: "My Spirit is upon thee, my words I have put in thy mouth." (Is. lix, 21.) Here is an anticipatory promise of that which is more fully given elsewhere of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon men. Joel fully expressed it in those gracious words: "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." (Joel ii, 28.) This promise was in part fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, when Jesus sent the "promise of the Father" upon his disciples, and it is made secure to all men in the words of Christ wherein he says: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke xi, 13.) The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom and life. God will give that Holy Spirit to any one who will turn at his reproof and seek his face. That Spirit is the Spirit which regenerates sinners and begets them as sons of God. (John iii, 1-5.) Many thousands of years have given proof of the truth of this gracious promise. But God says more. "I will make known my words unto you." Not only the spirit of wisdom, but the words of wisdom, too. Not the Spirit alone without the articulate words which enable us to understand; not words alone without the Spirit, which would leave us only with knowledge which

might puff up but could not save us; but both together, each doing its appointed work. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." (John vi, 63.) Therefore, when the Gospel is preached, it is not preached "in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost" (I. Thess. i, 5); "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." (I. Pet. i, 12.) It is impossible not to see the foreshadowings of the Gospel in this beautiful passage.

II.—A NOTE OF WARNING.

God's purpose is salvation. His desire is that all men should be saved. He has no pleasure in the death of any man that dieth. He "will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." He is "long-suffering," "slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy"; but there is that in sin, whether it is the sin of the simple, of the scorner, or of the stubborn fool, which will bring down upon it, if persisted in, the destruction of the sinner. God instructs, entreats, and rebukes. If men will not turn at his reproof, then he warns them of the consequences.

1. God clears himself of all blame.—There are those who speak hard things of God, saying that he takes pleasure in the destruction of sinners; that he is a cruel and revengeful God; that punishment appointed to sinners is arbitrary and vindictive. God clears himself of this charge. He does nothing out of mere arbitrary sovereignty. And no sinner goes down into the pit except against and in the face of God's protest and entreaty. "I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hands, and no man regarded." This is in harmony with God's warning to Israel. (Is. lxxv, 12; Jer. xiii; Ezek. viii, 18.) It also reminds us of what Jesus said to the Jews in his day: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, . . . and ye would not." "And ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." The words of the Apostle are to the same effect: "But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people." (Matt. xxiii, 37; John v, 40; Rom. x, 21.) Is this not the forerunner of the parable of our Lord in Matthew xxii, in which we see how the people "made light" of the Gospel call and "with one accord began to make excuse?"

2. The fault is the sinner's.—Of course sinners are at fault, and therefore guilty of their own sins. Sinners are not finally lost *because* they are sinners, but because when mercy and salvation come to them and are pressed upon them, they *will* not be saved.

“Ye have set at naught all my counsel and would none of my reproof.” God gives good counsel and loving and merciful entreaty. He also reproves that he may save; but if sinners will refuse, and will not regard and will set at naught God’s counsel, and have none of his reproof, there is nothing for them but to perish in their sin. What more can God do than he has done? Will not every mouth be stopped in that day when God exposes his dealings with men for the judgment of the intelligent universe? There is here a statement which at first shocks our Christian sensibility. God, or Wisdom, is represented as laughing and mocking with a divine and terrible irony when the wicked (who would not be saved, and who mocked, scoffed at, and scorned all the divine mercy) find themselves overwhelmed in the calamities which their sins finally bring upon them. There is a Nemesis in judgment which is terrible. God is thus represented as sitting in the heavens and laughing at all the machinations of the earth-powers against Jesus. (Ps. ii.) It is bold and terrible imagery, yet it does not convey the idea of flippancy or mere lightness with God, but the awful retribution to which the willful sinner is condemned. Jesus is represented as weeping over sinners who refuse his mercy, but in the judgment he also is terrible. (Rev. vi, 16, 17.)

3. The doom of the wicked.—For a time the wicked seem to prosper and God appears not to take account of their sins. This is his long-suffering mercy, and not “slackness” or forgotten wrath. Sinners in health and the enjoyment of their sins can mock and scoff and boast of their confidence against God, but there is a storm of wrath gathering, and their “fear shall come upon them as desolation, and their destruction like a whirlwind.” (Zech. vii, 11-14.) “Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish,” said the Apostle to those who refused and rejected the counsel of God’s gracious Gospel. (Acts xiii, 41.) That was only the echo in the New Testament of these teachings and warnings of the Old Testament. But the sinner is responsible for the sudden destruction that comes upon him, and not God. “Therefore shall they eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.” (v. 31.)

III.—TOO LATE.

However brave a sinner may be in health and prosperity, and however confident he may be against the day of wrath when it is far from him, when it comes like sudden destruction and the bursting of the whirlwind upon him, he who would none of God’s counsel,

and refused when God called, will then himself call upon God. But it will be too late. He will indeed be eating the fruit of his own way. "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord." (Gen. vi, 3; Jer. xiv, 12.) Therefore all their ruin has come upon them. I suppose we are to understand that this vain call will be in the next world after judgment has been carried out, as in the case of the rich man. (Luke xvi, 19-31.) The lesson closes with two observations.

1. The danger of heedlessness.—"The turning away of the simple shall slay them." Let not those careless, light-hearted sinners, who take refuge in the thought that they "are not so very bad," think that their comparative innocence of gross sins or open infidelity shall save them. It is enough that they "neglect this great salvation." "How then shall they escape?" (Heb. ii, 3.) "The turning away of the simple shall slay them." Let not those sinners who have prospered in their stubborn folly deceive themselves. That very prosperity (which they have taken as an evidence that God regards neither righteousness nor wickedness, and that moral actions have nothing to do with moral consequences) only deceives them. "The prosperity of fools shall destroy them."

2. A final entreaty.—It seems that God cannot let the matter rest. He turns again to entreat, to warn, and admonish. He does it this time with a promise: "Whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell *safely*, and shall be quiet from fear of evil." Fellowship with God is safety and peace at the same time. Surely the highest attainment of wisdom, as well as the beginning of it, is "the fear of the Lord."

XIX.

THE VALUE OF WISDOM.—Proverbs iii, 11–24.

(11) My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: (12) For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth. (13) Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding: (14) For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. (15) She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. (16) Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. (17) Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. (18) She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her. (19) The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. (20) By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew. (21) My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: (22) So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. (23) Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. (24) When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.—Proverbs iii, 11–24.

The second chapter of this wonderful book treats further of the excellency of wisdom, and exhorts the student to seek after her, and sets forth some of the spiritual benefits of walking in her ways. It also contains a solemn warning against the dangers of yielding to a common and dreadful sin which certainly leads its victim down to death. The third chapter opens with an exhortation to memory in favor of the law of wisdom; to keep close fellowship with mercy and truth; to trust in the Lord and not to lean unto one's own understanding, and in all our ways to acknowledge God; to fear the Lord and depart from evil; to honor the Lord with the first-fruits of our substance, and promises in return abundant temporal blessing. Thus are we taught that godliness is profitable both for the soul and the body, yielding rich rewards and returns both in spiritual and temporal fruits. How happy is the young man who carefully attends to the divine advice couched in this magnificent address!

I.—THE FIRST BEATITUDE.

Before entering upon a detailed account of the value of wisdom, the preacher king once more exhorts his son not to despise the chas-

tening of the Lord, nor to be weary of his corrections. We have been but recently studying this exhortation in connection with the Book of Job, which is devoted to a lengthened and elaborate illustration of the profound truth that affliction from the hand of the Lord has to do with the culture and training of the human spirit. In this exhortation we cannot but be struck with the similarity of thought, teaching, and language contained in Job. It points clearly to the fact that the writer of that sublime poem belonged to the school of wisdom that gathered about the wise king. The mystery of human suffering must always be a perplexing and distressful one to all who have not learned the lesson which the preacher here again enforces upon his "son." Suffering is no proof of the wrath of God, but, on the contrary, it is again and again declared to be the result and outcome of divine love. The old theology of nature and philosophy could make nothing out of affliction except that it was punishment sent for grievous sins committed. It is undoubtedly true that in the natural course of things virtue brings prosperous rewards and vice bears bitter fruit of evil. This truth stands true to the end. "He that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption." (Gal. vi, 8.) In this law God will not be mocked. The same truth is set forth by Paul again in Romans viii, 13, and also in the book we are studying. "He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity, and with the rod of his (God's) anger shall fail." (Prov. xxii, 8; Job iv, 8; Hos. x, 13; Ps. i, 4.) But this is not the whole truth. God has other uses for affliction than that of punishment, as Job and his friends found out. He would have all his children know that there is a vast difference between afflictions sent upon the wicked as punishment, and afflictions sent upon his children as chastisement. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." (Heb. xii, 6; Rev. iii, 19.) There are latent excellencies and possibilities of character which seem never to come to the front except under the stress and pressure of trial. It is a hard lesson for us to learn, and it cannot be learned unless we take heed to Wisdom, and out of her divine storehouse draw out understanding. When we are told that even the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, whom he loved above all things, in whom "his soul delighted," was made "perfect through suffering" (Heb. ii, 10), we should certainly understand that suffering is also a minister of salvation to us, and with meekness and patience learn to endure it, not to despise it, or even be weary of it. The testimony of ten thousand saints proves that suffering patiently endured in the faith of God's love and wisdom softens as

well as strengthens character, and fits for all those highest and holiest communions which God has in reserve for his saints.

1. The blessing of the knowledge of God.—The Beatitude is one of the most beautiful forms of God's teaching. The first Psalm gives us a fine example of the beatitudes scattered throughout the whole Bible. Our Lord's wonderful Sermon on the Mount is another example of this form of teaching; so are the beatitudes of the Book of Revelation. These beatitudes are pronounced upon man in connection with many things, but here we have a special one in connection with the man that findeth wisdom. We have already pointed out that wisdom when personified is taken to mean, first, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Wisdom of God; and second, that highest form of knowledge which we call religion or the fear of the Lord. Now the man that finds Jesus Christ and possesses him, and in him the knowledge and peace of God, is the "happy man" among men. There is no happiness on earth that can compare with that which flows from a real heart-knowledge of God. In that possession we "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (I. Pet. i, 8.) This wisdom is a possession to be found. It is worthy to be searched after. Job longed to find the place where it was hidden, for he was satisfied that only as he found this priceless treasure could he solve his present difficulties and come to a peaceful understanding of the ways of God. (Job xxviii, 12, 20.) It is not to be found in the schemes or imaginings of men; it is not to be found in minute scientific search into the secrets of nature. It has pleased God in *his* wisdom that the world by *its* wisdom shall *not* find God; but he hath reserved it for the "babes" in spirit, who attend to the word of his revelation, and hide not their faces from Jesus Christ, who only hath revealed God. (Job xxviii, 20, 21; Matt. xi, 25; I. Cor. i, 21; ii, 7-10; John i, 18.) When this wisdom is found the happy man is further blessed in the "getting of understanding," that is, in drawing out its treasures and using them in the practical details of life. Knowledge is of no advantage to us unless we use it, just as all riches avail not to benefit us unless we draw out of them for our use. A theoretical Christian is a vain Christian, but an experimental one is a happy one.

2. The treasures of wisdom.—"The merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold." The traffic in pure silver and gold was carried to a great extent in the days of Solomon. These silver and gold merchants were like the great bankers of our day. The king would have us know that the traffic in wisdom was infinitely better than all the profits arising

from the buying and selling of silver and gold. We are again reminded of the glowing panegyric bestowed on wisdom by Job (xxviii, 15-20), and of the evidence, in the similarity of the language found in both these books, that the author of the Book of Job, if not Solomon himself, was one of his wise men, most likely Heman. (I. Kings iv, 31.) Wisdom "is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her." This language is the wildest extravagance if it is applicable only to human wisdom, be it of the very highest type. For of human wisdom we have abundant testimony that God regards it but as foolishness with him. But recurring again to wisdom as being the type and foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, we easily understand the reference to him of whom it is said: "It pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell;" "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col. i, 19; ii, 3.) When we think of all the treasures of grace (he is "full of grace and truth," "and of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace," John i, 14, 16) that are in Christ—forgiveness, justification, regeneration, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption—then we can understand this comparison. What, indeed, are silver and gold, rubies and all things that one could desire, in comparison with the riches in Christ, "the riches of his glory," "the exceeding riches of his grace," and all "the unsearchable riches of Christ"? (Eph. i, 7, 18; ii, 7; iii, 8, 16.)

3. Length of days, riches, and pleasure.—The wise king, speaking further of the riches of wisdom, enumerates several other things. (i) "Length of days is in her right hand." It does not always follow that every true Christian shall have length of days *in this world*, though it is undoubtedly true that the quiet of mind, peace of conscience, and the general high moral tone of those who have the wisdom of God all tend to the health of the body and so to the prolongation of life. There is, however, I think, an obscure hint at immortality here; that everlasting life which is guaranteed in Jesus Christ by his resurrection from the dead. It was the lament of Job that man "is of few days and full of trouble" (Job xiv, 1); but then Job was speaking as one who had not found wisdom, and knew not the secret place of her dwelling. This immortality (length of days) is the gift of Wisdom's right hand. In her left hand she presents "riches and honor"—the true riches which do not take to themselves wings and fly away, and the true honor which cometh from God and not from man. Yet it is still true that religion, truly possessed and truly lived, tends to substantial prosperity and to honor among men.

Religion is the highest wisdom for this life even. (ii) "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Here is a beautiful description of the path of the just, "that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." How utterly out of this path are those who think fellowship with God takes all the pleasure out of life and destroys peace. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you," said Jesus to his sorrowing disciples. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus," said the Apostle. (John xiv, 27; Phil. iv, 7.) "On earth peace good will towards men," was the first note in the song of the angel who announced the birth of the Eternal Wisdom of God into this foolish world of ours. It is the way of the transgressor that is hard, while the yoke and burden of Christ are easy and light. The world is never so wrong as when it assumes and declares that religion takes the sunshine out of life. If Paul could declare his contentment in prison, in hunger, in emptiness, in stripes, and afflictions (Phil. iv, 11), how much more is life full of pleasantness when these things are absent. It is the companionship of God that makes life beautiful, and all the highways and every by-path of life pleasant and full of quiet peace. The teaching of this verse is that in every circumstance of life the possessor of wisdom finds pleasantness and is secure against fear. Is he not in God's world? Is he not God's child? Has he not the prospect even of a "better country" when he is done with this one? Is he not steadily leaving all his evil things behind him and going on to his good, better, and best things? It is not thus with the sinner, whose only possessions and pleasure are in this life. He is leaving those good things behind him, youth, friends, pleasures (which cloy and are worn out with much use), health, and life itself, and is going on to those evil things which await the ungodly in the next world. Surely this is true, that Wisdom's ways are pleasant and her paths are peace. The sun shines more brightly to the Christian because it is God's sun. The world is more beautiful because it is God's world, after all. All things in the world are more lovely and grateful because God has put them here for his children to enjoy. God's children are at peace in the world because they are in their Father's world. The children of sin are in God's world, but as being alienated and estranged from him; and though they get some of the good things in this world, they get them without a Father's blessing, and as thieves and robbers get things and enjoy (?) them.

4. Wisdom is the tree of life.—In this passage there is the undoubted reference to the Garden of Eden and the tree of life,

which was guarded after the Fall. Lost by reason of sin, it is regained in Christ, the Wisdom of God. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John xvii, 3.) Eternal life is the gift of God to them that lay hold on Wisdom. There is no flaming sword turning every way to prevent a sinner coming to this tree of life, but rather now cherubim of the flaming sword stand to guard the way and keep it open for sinners. "Whosoever will, let him come." This is God's imperative command to all who would hinder. But Christ must be laid hold of. He must be possessed by the willing choice of man, else there is no life in him for man. Life, being the *gift* of God, must be the voluntary *choice* of man. "Happy is every one that retaineth her." Is there an intimation here of the possibility of losing eternal life after having once been possessed of it? I think not. It is rather the added statement of blessing to those who, having found Wisdom, cleave to her. It is the suggestion of contrast. How miserable must the man be who, having once known the joy of life, the ways of peace and pleasantness, loses hold on such blessings! There may be here also a suggestion of the truth spoken by Jesus: "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." (Matt. x, 22.) So good a gift is worthy of being held fast by the possessor, and ought not to be lightly esteemed.

II.—WHAT WISDOM IS TO GOD.

Hitherto the king has been speaking of Wisdom in relation to man, but in this passage he changes the direction of his thought and speaks of Wisdom in relation to God. We are still to understand the reference to the Eternal Word or Wisdom of God. He who is everything to us is also everything to God. He by whom all the wonders and treasures of the new creation are made sure to us is he by whom "all things consist," and without whom "was not anything made that was made." The same things attributed to Wisdom in this passage are attributed to the Word of Jehovah in the sixth verse of the Thirty-third Psalm, and to Jesus the "Word" in the first chapter of John, and also at large and length by the Apostle in the first chapter of his letter to the Colossians.

1. The earth founded by wisdom.—"The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens." "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." (John i, 3.) "By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and

invisible." (Col. i, 16.) The reference of the king to the part played by Wisdom in the creation refers us back to the original story in the Book of Genesis. The references of John and Paul to the part taken in the creation by Jesus Christ leaves us in no doubt as to the identity of the "Wisdom" of Solomon and the "Eternal Word" of John.

2. The earth stored and supplied by wisdom.—"By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew." Here is another reference to the story in Genesis. (Gen. i, 2, 7; vii, 11.) The story of the Wisdom in creation is wonderfully, beautifully, and sublimely told by God himself in his answer to Job (Job xxxviii) which is one of the finest passages in the Bible. We are reminded here of the two great sources of the earth's supply of water, which means life to all living creatures. "The depths" refer to the great stores of water which are always laid up in the earth, from which come forth the springs and into which the wells are sunken. The "clouds" are those great reservoirs of water which hang suspended in the atmosphere ready to drop forth the dew, or pour down the rain, as the earth shall need it according to the wisdom and understanding of God. We cannot sufficiently study and admire the wonderful works of God as our Creator and Preserver. If God uses wisdom in his work and administration, we are likewise encouraged by the divine example thus set, to seek after it and to use it in our sphere as God does in his.

III.—EXHORTATION AND PROMISE.

The wise king concludes this section of his address by an exhortation to a careful watch over Wisdom, and makes promises on Wisdom's behalf to such as are careful to find and to keep her.

1. Wisdom is to be carefully kept.—Wisdom is not a gift to be lightly set store by. "My son, let not them depart from thine eyes," that is, "sound wisdom and discretion." These are most precious treasures, and are to be kept under watchful eyes and guarded as a man guards his jewels. This exhortation is like that of Christ to his disciples, who bade them "watch and pray" in the face of temptation. There are many enemies at work to seduce young men from the path of wisdom even after they have entered upon it, and to rob them of this divine gift even after they have possessed themselves of it. "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (Rev. iii, 11.)

2. Wisdom is an ornament to the life.—Wisdom is not only life unto our souls, but grace unto our necks. Religion is necessary

for our salvation, but it is more than that, it is an ornament to our lives. There is nothing more beautiful in a man's life than that consistent carrying out in all his ways of the holy precepts of God's law, and the consistent exemplification of the life of Christ. If we are bidden to "adorn the doctrine of God" (Tit. ii, 10), it is no less true that this doctrine will adorn us. The beauty of holiness is a beauty beyond that of the most costly and gorgeous jewels.

3. Wisdom's ways are safe ways.—In a former passage we are told that the ways of Wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. Here the thought and promise is carried further, and the king tells his son that guarding Wisdom and adorning life with it, he shall walk safely and his foot shall not stumble. The main reason is that walking in Wisdom's way keeps us out of the paths where danger lies. The wicked are involved in dangers and stumble and fall because they, not being accompanied by Wisdom, are led into temptation and places of danger. The promise further adds that we shall lie down without fear. God becomes our protection, and we sleep in this world with a conscience at peace with God, and know that nothing can finally do us any harm. "Thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet." There is no pillow so soft and no sleeping-potion so sweet as friendship with God. To lie down with unforgiven sin on our conscience, knowing that should we die ere we wake again we should go out into a world of darkness, must give sinners more or less trouble. Whereas the Christian may sleep sweetly even in the face of death, for he knoweth that even if death comes in the night watches he will awaken in the presence of God.* An old Christian very near to death's door was composing himself to sleep, not knowing whether he would awake again in this world. He was asked if he did not hesitate to go asleep when he knew himself to be so near to the brink of death. "No," he replied, "I am not afraid. If I should die before I awake I shall be with the Lord; on the other hand, should I awaken again, in time, the Lord will still be with me." In this he but expressed the confidence of the Apostle, who said: "Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: . . . and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him." (II. Cor. v, 6-9.)

* "He who leans on the Father's breast
May sleep when storms are nigh."

XX.

FRUITS OF WISDOM.—Proverbs xii, 1-15.

(1) Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge: but he that hateth reproof is brutish. (2) A good man obtaineth favour of the Lord: but a man of wicked devices will he condemn. (3) A man shall not be established by wickedness: but the root of the righteous shall not be moved. (4) A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones. (5) The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the counsels of the wicked are deceit. (6) The words of the wicked are to lie in wait for blood: but the mouth of the upright shall deliver them. (7) The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand. (8) A man shall be commended according to his wisdom: but he that is of a perverse heart shall be despised. (9) He that is despised, and hath a servant, is better than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread. (10) A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. (11) He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding. (12) The wicked desireth the net of evil men: but the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit. (13) The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips: but the just shall come out of trouble. (14) A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth: and the recompense of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him. (15) The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.—Proverbs xii, 1-15.

With the tenth chapter the character of the Book of Proverbs changes from the sustained and homiletical to the fragmentary and strictly proverbial. The proverbs of Solomon (x, 1) are from here gathered together. Out of the three thousand which he is said to have spoken (I. Kings iv, 32), a little more than three hundred have been given us. These are of a strictly ethical character. They were probably selected and arranged by Solomon himself, or at least under his direction. They consist of brief, pithy sayings, in which the whole thought of the speaker is compressed into a single short sentence. The form is usually antithetic, that is, he compares or contrasts the good man with the bad man, and the fruits or results of the life and sayings of the one with those of the other. Usually he makes the bad man, his devices, and the results of his life the background against which he throws the picture of the righteous man and his fruits, though sometimes he changes this order. The thought seldom extends into two sentences, and there is little or no connection between any one proverb and the next. Each proverb stands by itself. There is

apparently no arrangement at all in the order of them. They seem to have been taken, as it were, at random from a commonplace book in which the speaker or his reporter jotted them down as they occurred to him or were heard to fall from his lips. There are certain characteristic words, and they are all constructed according to the generally received ethical teachings of the day and the school of Solomon. Virtue and vice, righteousness and wickedness, bring their own rewards, especially in this life. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," is the law of the proverbs. A good and virtuous man will in the end reap happiness and prosperity; whereas the wicked and deceitful man will ultimately be overthrown and snared in his own meshes. The good man not only prospers himself, but contributes to the prosperity of others; the bad man suffers the consequences of his own wickedness alone, without the help of others to bear them. It is difficult, if not impossible, to treat any number of these proverbs (thus grouped together) in a homiletical way. They must be taken separately and studied one by one. The general object to be attained by the study of these proverbs is stated in the first six verses of the opening chapter of the book.

1. The gracious and the brutish man. (v. 1.)—The contrast here set up is between the man who gladly seeks and uses the means of grace, and the self-contained, carnal man who despises and rejects all instruction in the divine or spiritual life.

(i) The instruction here spoken of is instruction in wisdom or spiritual life. The truly gracious man, or, as we may say, the truly converted man, desiring all the time more and more knowledge of God and of Christ, the true Wisdom, will always be grateful for instruction in divine things. He will eagerly use all the means of grace which may come to his hand or which he may obtain by searching after it. Mere conversion is not enough. God converts us in order that we may be instructed in righteousness and thereby "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (II. Pet. iii, 18; Col. i, 10.) To this end he has given us his Word and appointed and fitted teachers (Eph. iv, 11-14; I. Cor. xii, 28), that we may be "conformed" and "transformed" into the very image of Christ. (Rom. xii, 2; II. Cor. iii, 18.) Such a man will be found in the house of God listening to the teacher whom God has set over him; he will be found reading his Bible and diligently searching the Scriptures as the Bereans did, and as Nathanael and the Eunuch did; and he will be much and earnestly in prayer for more knowledge, as Paul was. (John i, 48; Acts viii, 30; xvii, 11; Phil. iii, 10.) With David he says: "One thing have I desired of the Lord,

that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." (Ps. xxvii, 4.)

(ii) "The brutish man" is the man who ignores his spiritual nature, and is so far nothing more than a horse or a dog, for the difference between the man and the brute is essentially this, that one has a spiritual nature and the other has not. To deny the spiritual nature, therefore, and neglect all instruction in the wisdom of God, is to act and to be little more or better than a brute. Such a man hates reproof. He resents all religious instruction, and refuses to make any inquiry into the things of God. He is offended if you speak to him about a soul, and seeks only the things that belong to this present life. To him the Bible, the Church, prayer, and all religious associations are objectionable and exceedingly distasteful.

2. The good and the wicked man. (v. 2.)—The "good" man is here the same character as in the former verse, only he is described by a word which denotes his actions rather than his desires and motives.

(i) "A good man obtaineth favor of the Lord." A man is just according to the favor which he obtains from the Lord. The favor of the Lord is just the grace of God worked out into blessing. It is said of Samuel and Jesus that they grew and were in favor with God and man. (I. Sam. ii, 26; Luke ii, 52.) Nothing could be more desirable than to have such a blessing as this. "Whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain" (or bring forth) "favor of the Lord." (Prov. viii, 35.) This is the good man's portion, not as a reward of his goodness, but as the accompaniment of it, and, farther back, the cause of it. With God's favor, we may, if need be, dispense with the favor of man, but in reality those who are in favor with God are usually so with man. (Acts ii, 47; Rom. xiv, 18.) There is a suggestion in the word "obtains" which signifies to "draw out." God is a great storehouse of grace, and the good man is at liberty to "draw out" from that storehouse all the grace which he needs or desires. He may have as much as ever he wants.

(ii) "But a man of wicked devices will he condemn." The man who slights the favor of God and seeks to profit his life by his own counsel usually falls into the habit of making wicked or ungodly plans and schemes to bring about his ends. In this, as we shall see further on, he usually fails, and besides that, falls under the condemnation of God. The whole difference between a good man and a bad man is that one lives in fellowship with God and has his favor, and the other rejects the counsel of God, leans to his own under-

standing, invents wicked devices, and falls under God's condemnation. A man should be very courageous, not to say very foolish, to live deliberately without God.

3. The fruit of wickedness and righteousness. (v. 3.)—In this proverb the wicked man is spoken of first, and the contrast is between the end or fruits of the different characters.

(i) "A man shall not be established by wickedness." A man without God may sometimes by wickedness succeed for the time being in obtaining his earthly desires. He may by dishonesty grow rich; he may by falsehood, cunning, and intrigue obtain the high places and the great prizes of life; but by wickedness he can never establish himself. "That prosperity which is raised by sin is built on sand, and so it will soon appear." Ill-gotten gains do not usually abide, and will not deliver a man in the day of wrath (Prov. xi, 4); and the high places attained by wickedness are "slippery places" (Ps. lxxiii, 18), and from them his feet will soon slide.

(ii) "But the root of the righteous shall not be moved." A good man may not always be able to compete with the man of wicked devices, but what he secures will usually stay by him, and he will get more happiness out of his little, righteously come by, than the wicked does out of his abundance attained by wicked devices. His root "shall not be moved." Even if he lose what he has gained in this world, or adversity like a fierce wind blows away all prosperity from him (as the storms do the fruit and even the branches from the tree), yet, being rooted in Christ, that root shall abide, and if his branches do not spread themselves widely and flourish in this world, they will spring up from the root in the next world and bear fruit of infinite blessedness. Even in this world, being so planted, he shall have the comprehension of the love of Christ and be filled with all the fullness of God, which is better than all worldly prosperity. (Eph. iii, 14-19.)

4. The virtuous wife and the one that maketh ashamed. (v. 4.)—Here we have a proverb concerning wives.

(i) "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband." The word virtue implies energy and strength of character rather than mere chastity. (Ruth iii, 11; II. Pet. i, 5.) Such a woman is fully described in the thirty-first chapter, from the tenth to the thirty-first verses—a woman who is careful and thrifty, not given to the mere frivolities of the world, but strong and energetic in the discharge of all wifely duties and household business. Such a one is a crown to her husband. In her possession he is as happy as a king. A crown is both an ornament and a symbol of gladness and power. (Song of

Solomon iii, 11.) So the man who is blessed with a good wife is himself adorned by her, and his place and power are vastly increased among men. Many a man owes all that he is in the world to a virtuous wife. "He that findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord," provided she be a virtuous woman.

(ii) "But she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones." This is the silly, frivolous woman, who neglects her duties and gads about, doing and saying foolish things. Truly, as Matthew Henry says, "He that is plagued with a bad wife is as miserable as if he were on a dunghill." He is wretched at home and ashamed of her among other men, especially those who have good wives. His misery in the possession of such a woman, to whom he is bound for life, is as if he were afflicted with leprosy, *i. e.*, "rottenness in his bones." Miserable at home, he is ashamed of her abroad.

5. Right thoughts and deceitful counsels. (v. 5.)—Here we are taught the great importance of right thoughts and motives, and what comes of them.

(i) "The thoughts of the righteous are right." The proof of a man's character and the strength of it are in his thoughts. "As a man thinks, so is he." Actions are only thoughts embodied. A truly righteous man is one in whom the Spirit of Christ dwells, and the trend of his thoughts will be right and so his life will conform to his thinking. We are exhorted to "think" on all right things (Phil. iv, 8), as a means of spiritual culture. A righteous man may be afflicted with evil or vain thoughts, but he will not entertain or cherish them, but hate them, as David did. (Psalm cxix, 113.)

(ii) "The counsels of the wicked are deceit." A good man is continually thinking good and honest thoughts, seeking out how he may benefit not only himself in the fear of the Lord, but how he may benefit others. On the other hand, the wicked man is thinking wicked things; is not frank and honest in his motives; is always suspicious himself—being evil he thinks others are like himself; and his counsels are dictated by deceit, that he may act, as the saying is, "with a long reach, and succeed by an overreach." We are warned against the cherishing of such evil thoughts against our neighbors to take advantage of them. "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying," etc. (Deut. xv, 9, 10.)

6. Wicked words and upright speech. (v. 6.)—Here we have an advance from thoughts to deeds.

(i) "The words of the wicked are to lie in wait for blood." They seek to deceive with their words in order to destroy those whom they hate. A man may commit murder with his thoughts and

words. So the Jews laid in wait for Christ and sought to take him in his words that they might deliver him over to death. (Luke xx, 21, 22.) This is a very common form of sin. Evil-speaking and slander is a part of this murderous habit.

(ii) "But the mouth of the upright shall deliver them." The wicked seek by deceitful and false words to destroy the lives or characters of men; whereas the mouth or the words of the upright are at the service of those in need, and will come to their help in time of need. Many a good man, by speaking a good, kind, or encouraging word, has put heart and hope into the discouraged and freed others from suspicion or false accusation. Such good may be done by a single word rightly and fitly spoken.

7. The overthrow of the wicked and the house of the righteous. (v. 7.)—There is similar teaching in verse three and in x, 25, 30. These verses are a better commentary than we can offer.

(i) "The wicked are overthrown." They have built upon sand, and though they may prosper for a time they are sure to come down. Their sin is certain to find them out in the end. They stand in such slippery places that the least touch will send them flying down to destruction. Envy not the prosperity of the wicked. (Job iv, 8, 9.)

(ii) "The house of the righteous shall stand." The prosperity of the righteous has a good foundation. It is built upon a rock. Death may cut them off, but their house is one that has God for its guarantor. They shall find in heaven a house not made with hands, and God will preserve their families on earth and maintain their good name among men.

8. Wisdom and perversity. (v. 8.)—Here we have a contrast between the final judgment upon the character of the man of wisdom and of the man of a perverse heart.

(i) "A man shall be commended according to his wisdom." The sincerity of a man's piety will be the true measure of his reputation as well as the gauge of his character. In the end a sincerely godly man is respected even by wicked men. His reputation does not depend upon his riches, but on his personal worth. Character and reputation do not always go together, but in the long run they will appear neck and neck at the judgment both of God and men.

(ii) "He that is of a perverse heart shall be despised." The man of crooked character and deceitful ways may make his way in the world, and if for the time being he is successful, will have sycophants about him; but in the long run he, too, will be estimated according to his true worth. Men will despise him (though they

fawn upon him) and God will condemn him. "Everlasting shame and contempt" are the portion of the perversely wicked.

9. Humility and pride. (v. 9.)—Here we have a contrast in the actual condition of the man who, though poor, has enough to live upon, and the man who is proud, and vain of himself and his position, and yet has no bread.

(i) "He that is despised and hath a servant." The language is obscure; but it may mean a man who is so poor as to have but one servant; or it may mean a man who makes a servant of his humility, who is not ashamed of his poverty, but accepts it humbly, and by his labor secures enough to support himself with, is better off in this world than the man who is proud of a great name or some empty title and yet is so poor as not to have bread.

(ii) "He that honoreth himself and lacketh bread." "Pride and poverty do not go well together." This may be the man who is poor and yet too proud to work; or the man who feels that his title or family name would be put to shame if he should turn his pride into a humble servant and make it work for him. There is many a contented and happy working-man who is infinitely better off than hundreds of penniless noblemen whose only possession is the name and title of some dead ancestor.

10. The merciful and the cruel man contrasted. (v. 10.)—One of the truest tests of character is in the disposition of men toward dumb animals.

(i) "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast." A man who has the Spirit of God in him is in true sympathy with the whole creation. He even tries to put himself in the place of his beast, and extends the operations of the golden rule to it as well as to his fellow-man. He tries to know even the feelings of a brute beast, and so comes to regard them. He knows that the tender mercies of God are over all his works (Jonah iv, 11), and he remembers that God has commanded kindness to animals. (Ex. xx, 10; xxiii, 4, 5.) Here in India the Hindoo would regard it as the greatest of sins to take the life of any living creature; but there is no country in the world where animals (especially domestic animals) are so cruelly treated.

(ii) "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." The feelings and emotions of the wicked narrow toward the dumb creation, whereas the feelings of kindness in the righteous man widen toward them, and are all the more pitiful because of their helplessness to express their trouble or pain.

11. Industry and Idleness contrasted. (v. 11.)—In this verse we have a further proverb bearing on humility and pride.

(i) "He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread." This is an invariable law. Honest industry may not always lead to wealth, but will certainly guarantee the necessities of life. It is even said that he "shall have plenty of bread." (xxviii, 19.) It is safe to depend on this rule. If more people would keep to the tilling of the land there would be less poverty in the great cities.

(ii) "He that followeth vain persons is void of understanding." Men who are ambitious to ape the manners and customs of the idle rich, and esteem honest toil or work degrading, show themselves to be fools. In chapter twenty-eight, nineteenth verse, it is said that such a one "shall have poverty enough." But here the thought is deeper. Idleness or vagrancy, in the high or low, is folly of the worst sort, and leads to things infinitely worse than poverty.

12. The desire of the wicked and the fruit of the righteous. (v. 12.)—The thought is as to the end of the two courses of life.

(i) "The wicked desireth the net of evil men." This is somewhat obscure, but may mean that wicked men are so infatuated with the way of other wicked men that they run into their practices, though they are certain to snare them in their own wickedness, and bring upon them the judgment of God. Or it may mean that in time of trouble they turn to wicked men for protection, but find only a net which ensnares them.

(ii) "The root of the righteous yieldeth fruit." (Ps. i, 3.) The man whose life is "rooted and grounded" in the love of God (Eph. iii, 17) is certain to yield an abundance of fruit, the chiefest of which is "holiness, and the end everlasting life." (Rom. vi, 22; Gal. v, 22, 24.)

13. The end of the wicked and the righteous contrasted. (v. 13.)—In this passage truth is contrasted with cunning deceitfulness.

(i) "The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips." Many a man has told one lie to avoid the consequences of some evil deed, or to free himself from the effects of a former lie. Nothing is surer to bring a man into final ruin than the practice of lying. "The transgression" of one's lips, whether it be in lies or evil or hasty speaking, is an almost certain snare to catch a man in sin. "Many a man has paid dear in this world for the transgression of his lips, and has felt the lash on his back for the want of a bridle on his tongue." (Ps. lxiv, 8.)

(ii) "The just shall come out of trouble." The man who sticks to the truth and "bridles his tongue" may get into trouble, but in the end it will be seen that God comes to his rescue and will deliver him.

14. Good words and good deeds. (v. 14.)—Words as well as deeds bear their fruits and lead up to results.

(i) "A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth." This may refer not only to kind and truthful words, which always bring satisfaction to the soul of the speaker, but it may have reference to teaching the truth of God to others. In such a case, "He that watereth" others with the word of God "shall be watered also himself."

(ii) "And the recompense of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him." This is not a contrast of evil deeds with good words, but a continuation of the statement that whatsoever is done, either by word or deed, in the name of the Lord and for the good of one's fellow-man shall come back in sweet recompense to the doer. God is not forgetful of the least good deed done in his name and for his sake, even though it be but the giving of a cup of water to a thirsty man.

15. The way of the fool and the counsel of the wise. (v. 15.)—Foolish conceit and good advice are here contrasted.

(i) "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes." A fool will not seek advice, but is wise in his own eyes (iii, 7), and in his conceit thinks he knows better the way than any can tell him, and so he follows on to his own destruction, like a proud and headstrong man.

(ii) "He that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise." No man is so perfectly furnished with understanding that he can altogether dispense with the advice of others. Conceit keeps the fool from becoming wise, and the habit of hearkening unto good counsel keeps the wise man from becoming a fool. "Be not wise in your own conceits" is a bit of advice which he has followed, and which shows him to be a wise man, and is also a certain guaranty that he will continue one. The true source of wise counsel is in God himself, who has told us: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." (James i, 5.)

XXI.

AGAINST INTEMPERANCE.—Proverbs xxiii, 29–35.

(29) Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? (30) They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine. (31) Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. (32) At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. (33) Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. (34) Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. (35) They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.—Proverbs xxiii, 29–35.

The temperance lesson in this course of Bible study is one of frequent recurrence; yet it cannot be said that it is too frequently insisted on, for intemperance is one of the worst evils of our times, as it has been of all times; leading not only to the destruction of the individual, but to the corruption of the community and the overthrow of nations. It is one of those sins which, more than others, cannot be indulged in without bringing evil upon others. Those who stand nearest to the drunkard suffer the most, but the sphere of the drunkard's evil influence is an ever-widening one, and he affects the entire community in which he lives. There is no evil in this life to which it does not lead up, and the end of it is eternal death, for no drunkard "shall inherit the kingdom of God." (I. Cor. vi, 10.) It is not only a physical evil, destroying the body, but it is a mental and moral evil, corrupting the mind and destroying the soul. The drunkenness is classed with the stealing, the covetousness, the reviling and extortion, and the adultery. It is said to have its seat in the heart and not only in the physical nature of man. (Matt. xv, 19; Mark vii, 21; Gal. v, 19–22.) One only has to look at the sins associated with drunkenness to see what frightful company it is in, and to consider the end of these dreadful sins to see what the end of the drunkard will be. It is a singular thing that the devil has so deceived the world on this point that drunkenness is treated as a misfortune rather than a sin, and the drunkard is regarded rather as a weak man than a bad man. A thief, an extortioner, or a murderer is regarded as a criminal, but the drunkard is looked upon simply

as a man of unfortunately weak habit of mind, who cannot avoid getting into an excess of appetite. A man convicted of theft is forever a disgraced man in the eyes of the community in which he lives, whereas a drunkard is forgiven his drunkenness whenever he chances to be sober. Yet God classes the thief and the drunkard, the liar, the adulterer, and the murderer together, amongst the sinners who shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven. Hosea draws a graphic picture of the misery to which Israel had been reduced by sin and transgression, and for which, finally, she as a nation suffered the judgment of God and was made drunk with the wine of the wrath of Almighty God. (Is. li, 17, 22.) "By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery," the land was filled with violence and sin. (Hos. iv, 2.) All of these sins are in other places in the Bible ascribed to the habit of strong drink. It is not claimed that none of these sins are committed except by drunkards, but that all these sins are induced and led up by that fearful habit.

Drunkenness is one of the oldest sins spoken of in the Bible. It must have been the common sin of that fearful age of violence and lawlessness before the Flood, and have so spread among all classes that even so good a man as Noah was overtaken by it. (Gen. ix, 21.) We know also that Lot, the one righteous man that dwelt in Sodom, was not without fault in this matter; for if he had not been in the habit of drinking, and that to excess, it is certain that his wicked daughters could not have plied him with drink to such an extent as to lead him into the awful sin of incest. (Gen. xix, 32.) It is supposed that the sin of Nadab and Abihu, for which they were stricken dead before the tabernacle, was the result of drunkenness; for immediately afterward the ordinance was enacted forbidding a priest to drink wine and strong drink when ministering about the house of God. (Lev. x, 1, 9.) It had become a common practice even among the priests in the days of Eli, so that he was not surprised to see Hannah in the tabernacle, as he supposed, drunk. (I. Sam. i, 13.) And certainly it had gone so far that the sons of Samuel were but sons of Belial, even in their drunkenness and debauchery going so far as to bring lewd women into the very courts of the tabernacle to commit sin with them. But to follow the subject in its general history would be to cite passages from the history of Israel out of every book in the Bible. So common and notorious was the sin of drunkenness that in the days of Joel he addressed the whole nation as a nation of drunkards and drinkers of wine. (Joel i, 5.) That it was a prevalent sin in the days of our Lord and the apostles is abundantly testified by the many exhortations and warn-

ings against it. "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, . . . and so that day come upon you unawares." (Luke xxi, 34.) "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; and not in rioting and drunkenness." (Rom. xiii, 13.) "Excess of wine" was one of the marks of an unconverted state, and is spoken against as inconsistent with the Christian life, just as lasciviousness, lust, and abominable idolatries are. (I. Pet. iv, 3.) But we need not follow these general teachings further. He who runs may read the language of God's Word on this subject. To see how true those considerations are, one only has to look around him in every walk and condition of life. Not until the Church and even the world wake up to the fact that drunkenness is a sin against God and a crime against society, and begin to deal with it and treat the drunkard as they treat the thief, the robber, the libertine, and the murderer, may we hope to check, not to say subdue, this terrible evil, which is a growing one, especially under the fostering care of governments and municipalities who are accessories to the evil by a league with the liquor-sellers for the sake of revenue.

It is a fact which must be acknowledged, that the teaching of the Bible is not that of total abstinence from the use of wine, but from the too great use of it, even to the point of drunkenness. In the discussion of this subject nothing is to be gained by trying to force teachings out of the Bible which are not in it. The priest, during the period of his service, and the Nazarite, while his vow was upon him, were absolutely forbidden the use of wine or strong drink; but there was no such prohibition laid upon the people at large. The charge is against drunkenness and not against the legitimate use of wine, just as the charge is against gluttony (v. 20) and not against the use of food. Whether or not it is wise and expedient for Christian men and women to become total abstainers as a matter of liberty and expediency for the purpose of checking the horrible evil of drunkenness is another question, and will be discussed in a study later on in this series. There is no doubt, however, that all men who indulge in wine-drinking are in the first instance exposed to the danger of the sin of drunkenness. Every man must urge for himself whether his strength is sufficient to drink temperately of the wine, without the danger of awakening an appetite for it which will lead to drunkenness. And so every one must judge for himself whether in all circumstances it is his duty for the sake of others totally to abstain from the use of all wine and strong drink.

I.—A QUESTION AND AN ANSWER.

The question raised in the passage of Scripture which we have immediately under discussion is a further commentary on the exhortation of Solomon found in the twentieth verse of this chapter: "Be not among wine-bibbers; among riotous eaters of flesh." His purpose is to dissuade from the excessive use of strong drink, and to this end he draws a vivid picture of the general consequences of the habit. The questions which he puts are sarcastic as well as affirmative. The picture which he draws is true to life.

1. "**Who hath woe?**"—The woe here spoken of is descriptive of direful distress, in which is implied both the condemnation of God for a sin committed and a certain awful condition of suffering. "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them!" "Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink." (Is. v, 11, 22.) There is a threat contained in these two "woes" pronounced by the prophet, and there is a subtle touch of meaning in the word "inflame." Until wine inflame them, that is, until wine "pursue them." Drunkenness which is first indulged in as a pleasure becomes a master, and a pursuing avenger. Sin of all kinds brings its own punishment, but there is no sin which so speedily and relentlessly pursues its victim as the sin of drunkenness.

2. "**Who hath sorrow?**"—Everybody has more or less sorrow, but all sorrows are not the sorrows of sin: some are those of affliction from the good hand of God for our nurture, such as Job suffered; and some are they which come on account of the sins of others, as the sorrow of a father over a prodigal son; and some are the sorrows that come in the course of nature, as the sorrow that comes because of the death of those whom we love. These are the sorrows which cannot be hindered or helped; but the drunkard has sorrow of his own making: he deliberately brings it upon himself. There is in the early stages of the drunkard's career an agony of sorrow and remorse which is sometimes very distressing and bitter to behold, and much more to bear; this sorrow wears away after the drunkard has become sottish. I have seen a drunkard, long after he has ceased to care for the evils which he has brought on himself, bitterly lament and curse his folly because of the sorrow he had brought upon his wife, children, and friends. The drunkard sows a crop of sorrow that springs up all around him; all the more so be-

cause it is most apt to be perpetual so long as he lives, for drunkenness, once it gets a man in its grip, seldom relaxes that grip until it has laid the drunkard's body in the grave and sent his soul to hell.

3. "**Who hath contentions?**"—It is a well-known fact that drunkenness more than any other habit or vice leads to strife and contentions. Nine tenths of all the brawls and fights, quarrels and misunderstandings in the world are traceable directly to this vice. It filled the world with violence before the Flood, and it has filled the world with strife ever since. There is that in strong drink which not only inflames the passions, but clouds the understanding and so weakens the will that small offenses which would otherwise be passed by are magnified into grievous wrongs, which call for resentment; nay, it causes men to take offense where none is intended, and leads to quarrels without a cause. If we could dismiss drunkenness from the land, we might be sure that nine tenths of the family quarrels, legal quarrels, and violent conflicts that lead to assault and murder would cease out of the land.

4. "**Who hath babbling?**"—Drunkenness so beclouds the intellect that a man under the power of strong drink loses control both of his senses and of his tongue. The consequence is that a drunkard is a "babbling" of foolish things, makes himself a laughing-stock to the bystanders; it induces small quarrelings about nothing, and leads to coarse, vulgar, and profane speech. It opens the floodgates of the heart (which is full of evil and foolish thoughts), and they rush out of the drunkard's lips like a brood of silly and vicious demons, to spread folly and misery around. Who has not seen with both pity and contempt the drunkard with thickened tongue and senseless thought babbling forth his folly, until for very shame of humankind he has turned away with more disgust than pity. The drunkard usually knows he is making a fool of himself, and yet has not the power to check his speech.

5. "**Who hath wounds without cause?**"—A bruised body and a battered face is the usual accompaniment of a drunkard's debauch. There are wounds which a man may carry with honor to himself and pride to his neighbors and friends: such as he may have received in defense of his country, or in the protection of the innocent, or the vindication of that which is right; but the wounds and bruises of the drunkard are without a justifying cause. They are the badges of his shame, the proofs of his sin.

6. "**Who hath redness of eyes?**"—The wounds which a drunkard receives are not all given by the hands of others. Drunkenness itself inflicts wounds on the body of the drunkard. It poisons

the blood, disorders the vital fluids of the body, corrupts the functions, and finally brings about a watery, blear-eyed deformity which at once disfigures the face and makes the whole countenance contemptible and revolting, and at the same time stamps the brand of the drunkard's sin upon him. We sometimes see a blind man going about with a placard around his neck proclaiming his affliction, "I am blind"; but the drunkard needs no placard. His eyes and his face tell their own story and make this proclamation to all the world: "I am a drunkard; a man given up to a deadly sin; one who has woe self-imposed; who has ruined his family, brought his children to poverty and shame, broken his wife's heart, forfeited the respect and esteem of all good men, and is on the broad road to hell." Thus does the drunkard advertise himself. The very devils must laugh at the wretched spectacle which a drunkard makes of himself.

The answer to this series of pertinent and sarcastic questions is found in the thirtieth verse.

1. **"They that tarry long at the wine."**—Wine, if used at all, should only be taken as a relish and in small quantities, and never to the extent of firing the brain or inflaming the blood. The drunkard is the man who tarries long over his cups, spending hours, and whole days and nights sometimes, drinking from place to place. Oh, the wasted time, the misspent hours, which the habit of drinking induces! If all the time spent over wine and strong drink were spent in useful labor or refreshing sleep, which fits for business and work, there would be little poverty in the world and comparatively small suffering; for with the spending of time over wine goes the spending of money and the waste of energy and strength, and even the disposition to industry and labor. "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them." This is the drunkard, who begins the day (and even takes pains to begin it early) with drink, and follows after it all day and into the night, and then is followed by drink the rest of his life until he is chased through the grave into the drunkard's hell.

2. **"They that go to seek mixed wine."**—There was in use a plain simple wine that hardly intoxicated, and then there was a mixture of wines with other ingredients which was stronger and more intoxicating. The drunkard's taste becomes dulled by drink and the desire for something stronger, and so he rises up and goes in search of all kinds of strongest drink, that he may add fuel to the fire he has already kindled in his blood. These mixed wines were probably the strong drink of the Scriptures.

II.—DISSUASION AND WARNING.

The wise king now speaks a word of earnest advice to avoid temptation, and a solemn warning as to the final consequences of drunkenness.

1. **“Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.”**—This is probably a mark of distinction between the harmless wines of the country, the pure juice of the grape, and those highly combined and deeply fermented wines which were manufactured with special reference to delighting the taste of the wine-bibber. Strong wines were red and fiery in appearance, perhaps by reason of high fermentation, or by reason of certain juices and herbs which were used in combination with the juice of the grape to add to its strength. The giving of its color in the cup probably refers to the sparkling bubbling of the strong wines, the sparkle of the fermentation, which causes quick intoxication. The expression “moveth itself aright” may refer either to those movements of the fermented cup which satisfies the strong drinker that the wine is of strong and rich quality, or to the delight with which the drunkard allows the wine to flow sweetly and deliciously from the cup down his throat, like “the best wine . . . that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak.” (Song of Solomon vii, 9.) Whenever wine becomes such a delight as this to the drinker, it is a sure sign that he is in danger of falling into the habit of drunkenness.

2. **“At the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder.”**—“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” (Prov. xx, 1.) The wine-cup promises pleasure, but it is a deceiving mocker. That is, it first deceives and then mocks its victims. It allures with the promise of pleasure, and then laughs when the calamity comes. It is a poison like that of the serpent and the adder. The frightful antithesis to the habit of drinking strong and mixed drinks until drunkenness becomes the habit and state of a man’s soul and body is seen in the terrible words of the Psalmist: “For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out the same; for the dregs thereof all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out and drink them.” (Ps. lxxv, 8.) The harvest of the drunkard is sown in red and mixed wine, and is reaped in wrath, the last bitter dregs of which he must wring out of the cup and drink, as he washed out the dregs of the wine-cup and drank them that he might lose nothing of the sweet poison contained therein.

III.—MORAL EFFECTS OF DRUNKENNESS.

Drunkenness does not travel in single harness. It yokes itself up with other sins.

1. **“Thine eyes shall behold strange women.”**—Wine fires the blood and inflames the passions of a man, and leads him to look lustfully after the strange women “whose ways lead to hell.” In a drunken or half-drunken state the moral sense is so blunted that the drunkard will give way to the lower lusts of his nature, which would shock him to think of if he were sober.

2. **“Thine heart shall utter perverse things.”**—In drunkenness perverse and wicked things out of the heart are framed into words which bind men to sin or involve them in most dreadful consequences. Many a drunken promise or speech has led to entanglements which a whole lifetime has not been long enough to unravel or disentangle.

IV.—TEMPORAL CONSEQUENCES OF DRUNKENNESS.

The drunken man is a man devoid of good judgment, and is constantly running into senseless dangers both physically and socially.

1. **“Thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea.”**—To make one’s bed on the waves of the sea, or in the trough of the sea, would be to be swallowed up in death. So is the drunken man. Or he is as a pilot who has gone to sleep when his ship is in the trough of the sea, allowing the tiller to slip out of his hand and his ship to be swamped with the waves which he might else have outridden.

2. **“Or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast.”**—The mast of a ship (especially in a storm) is a place of danger where the sailor needs all the alertness of a steady head to keep his footing. What folly for one to allow himself to fall asleep in such a place! Yet so will the drunkard fall asleep anywhere, on a railway track, in a burning house, or out in a winter’s blast where death by freezing will overtake him. A drunkard loses all sense of danger.

3. **Insensibility to all shame, and pain, and danger.**—“They have stricken me . . . and I was not sick, they have beaten me and I felt it not.” He is imprisoned or whipped as a common vagrant, but is insensible to it. It makes no difference to him. He is neither ashamed nor corrected by punishment or suffering.

“Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.” (xxvii, 22.) So it is with a drunkard under suffering and punishment.

4. **“When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.”**—Every other thought is swallowed up and lost in the absorbing thirst for drink. Out of prison or drunken sleep or perilous danger he will (without thought of the perils which he has escaped or the sufferings and punishments which he has endured) rush straight for the dram-shop again, and go still deeper into his degradation. Drunkenness, being first pursued, becomes the relentless pursuer, and there is no escape except by the almighty grace of God.

XXII.

THE EXCELLENT WOMAN.—Proverbs xxxi, 10-31.

(10) Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. (11) The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. (12) She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. (13) She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. (14) She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. (15) She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. (16) She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. (17) She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. (18) She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. (19) She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. (20) She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. (21) She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. (22) She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. (23) Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. (24) She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. (25) Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. (26) She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. (27) She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. (28) Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. (29) Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. (30) Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. (31) Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.—Proverbs xxxi, 10-31.

Our present study consists of the latter half of the teaching of King Lemuel that "his mother taught him." (v. 1.) Who King Lemuel was we have no means of knowing; but the teaching of his mother in respect of the "excellent woman" certainly entitles her words to be written in letters of gold, and bound upon the wrists and about the forehead of every young woman who aspires to the high dignity of being wife to a good man and mistress of a right household. Nor could a young man who desires a wife do better than to study this description of the virtuous woman, and have it in his mind while seeking for a life partner for himself. Both Paul and Peter have briefly described the general characteristics of what a godly wife ought to be (I. Tim. ii, 9, 10; I. Pet. iii, 1-6), but I think it must be admitted that the Old Testament picture is the more per-

fect bit of portraiture. More than half the misery in this world comes from ill-assorted marriages, and these come about because young men in choosing wives look not beneath the surface of the pretty face, or some attraction of the person, or to the social position or wealth of the women whom they choose for wives. Strength of character and home training are not inquired into. When a man wakes up to find that instead of a helpmeet for him he has simply gotten a silly, vain, and extravagant woman for a wife, the love that came in at the front door is apt to go out at the back door. If he should get a competent woman who is a "brawling woman" or evil-tempered woman, it is just as bad. There ought to be a balance between disposition and character, and the old rule that "beauty is as beauty does" should guide men in the selection of their wives. If young men should insist upon character and the proper training of girls under the guidance of excellent mothers as a condition of proposal for marriage, there would be fewer frivolous women and more happy homes.

I.—THE SEARCH AFTER A VIRTUOUS WOMAN.

In the days of the monarchy, when Israel grew rich and splendid under the reign of Solomon, the tendency among women was away from domestic virtues, industry, and the care of their husbands' houses, to idleness, fine dressing, mincing manners, and the cultivation of mere superficial attractions and personal charms. Apparently, good women were scarce in the days of King Lemuel, and yet they were never more needed than in his day, unless it be in our own day.

1. **The virtuous woman.**—The term virtue does not apply to chastity here, though of course it includes it. It is a word descriptive of character, energy, ability, and general capacity, both of body and mind. Not that of the so-called "strong-minded woman," but the able and energetic woman, whose character is a combination of both strength and meekness; the ability to command and manage her household well, and at the same time to be a companion and a sweet delight to her husband, as well as a fond and affectionate mother to her children. The fact that she is described in such language would imply that the virtuous woman is essentially a religious woman. (xxxii, 30.) The opposite description of a woman of *strong character* and yet not of virtuous character is that of Ezek. xvi, 30, where she is called "an imperious whorish woman"—that is, a headstrong and haughty woman, who will have her own way, and is more fond of the outside of her house than the

inside; who cares for other men as well as, if not better than, her husband.

2. The value of such a woman.—If things are intrinsically valuable, as gold and silver, diamonds and rubies, in proportion to their scarcity, then we have one reason why such a woman as is here described is precious, namely: Such women are very rare. “Her price is far above rubies.” But then it is not scarcity alone that makes such women valuable, but their intrinsic excellencies, such as dwell in rubies and pearls, qualities of rare fineness, incomparable beauty, and capable of greatly adorning the possessor of them. “A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband.” (xii, 4.) Rubies and pearls are of great value and represent wealth to the owner, but a man might well exchange silver and gold and all precious stones for a virtuous wife (not that virtuous wives may be bought, but that they are of more worth than rubies). A poor man with such a wife is happier than a prince, for a prince whose wife has not at least some of the excellencies of this woman is worse off than a beggar, though he have “all rubies.”

3. Virtuous women are scarce, and must be searched after.—“Who can find a virtuous woman?” asks the prophet, as though there were not many of them at the most, and these hard to find. This, as we have said, is an intimation that fashion and frivolity had already destroyed the character of most of the women, and that those who were of real virtue were not to be met with in the ordinary places of society. Like other precious things, they are hidden away in corners. These are women who are not to be sought for at the gay watering-places or under the glare of the world of fashion. The woman who dresses well and dances well is not necessarily a virtuous woman or one to be desired for a wife; though for that matter a virtuous woman may both dress well and dance well. The one described in our study at least dressed well. “Whoso findeth a wife” (such as this one) “findeth a good thing and obtaineth favor of the Lord.” That is to say, “a virtuous” or “prudent wife is from the Lord.” (Prov. xviii, 22; xix, 14.) We are taught in these two passages that the virtuous woman is one whose character has been sanctified by the grace of God, and that if such an one is to be found she is to be obtained (as grace is) from the Lord. Marriage is not or ought not to be a haphazard affair. If there is anything in this world in which a man needs divine guidance, it is in the selection of a wife. In searching for a wife let a man take the Lord into his confidence and choose him for his guide, and then his search will be rewarded by finding this hid treasure in the family of God.

II.—THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN DESCRIBED.

When a society reporter describes the conspicuous woman of the world his remarks are usually based upon her graceful carriage, the quality of her complexion, the gorgeousness of her dress, and the wealth of her jewels. But in this description of the virtuous woman the inspired prophet sets her before us in the wealth of her character and her good works.

1. As a wife.—(i) In relation to her husband. She is an object of trust and confidence, and a protector of his best wealth. “The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her.” (v. 11.) He has in the first place perfect confidence in her chastity and her personal loyalty to him. When he is away from home he suffers no anxiety on her account, and when he is at home he is disturbed by no doubts of her. But the strict meaning of this passage probably is that in respect of her general conduct and good sense he has perfect confidence. He can confide all his business to her, and in times of perplexity he can with equal confidence seek her advice. He is not anxious about the conduct of her household affairs. He knows she will not run into debt or do anything which will give him anxiety or cause him reproach. He has no worries on her account, either because of any fear of her ability or of her wise discretion. “He shall have no need of spoil.” (v. 11.) So prudent and careful is she of her husband’s house and affairs, so anxious not to spend above that which her husband can afford, that he has no need of grinding and grasping to get money enough to keep her extravagant habits supplied. If he has plenty, she will keep it with care; if he is behind-hand in money matters, she will by her prudent economy help him to a better position. In any case, such is her character as a “help-meet for her husband” that he may go about his business without any anxious or dishonest thought of how to rake and scrape money enough together to meet her expenditure. She is in fact such a mine of wealth to him in the management of the household that he does not need to seek spoil by sharp trading and overreaching, or wear himself out with anxiety to make money on her account. Much of the misery of men to-day, and not a little of their dishonesty, arises from the extravagance and vain, thoughtless, and wicked expense entailed by their wives. (ii) “She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.” (v. 12.) Her constant study is not only to make him cheerful and happy at home, but to do him good and save him from all evil. She looks after his personal com-

fort in health, and tenderly cares for him in sickness. She seeks, by good counsel, tender sympathy, and brave fellowship in any time of anxiety or trouble, to share and lighten his burdens. This not only during the honeymoon, with mere tender caresses and soft endearments, but she is constant in this purpose, and grows steadily more helpful as the years go by. All the days of her life her husband's happiness and welfare are the chief concern of her thoughts. (iii) In respect to his reputation among men, "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land." (v. 23.) That is, abroad about his public duties, her husband is so uniformly happy and cheerful, so wise and quiet in his mind, so free from anxiety and that impatient hurry to get rich or to consummate his plans, that everybody knows it must be because he has such a happy home. The wife makes a good reputation for him, and he is congratulated, if not in words, at least in the thoughts of his fellow-judges, on having a wife that has succeeded in doing him so much good. "Ah, there is a man," they say, "who has a wife among a thousand. He is a happy man."

2. As a housekeeper.—She is industrious and uses her time prudently. (i) "She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands." (v. 13.) The modern notion is that a wife should be supported in idleness, and bear no part in the support of the family; that she is to be dressed by her husband, and freed from all care, and allowed to squander her time either in idle accomplishments, mere idle reading, or senseless social diversions, while her husband is driven to seek the spoils of trade or profession. But this woman sees the necessity of helping her husband, and to this end she "worketh willingly with her hands." She is a woman who believes that it is as much the business of the wife as of the husband to be "not slothful in business." (Rom. xii, 11.) That is, in the practical affairs of life. In our day, soft white hands are more common with wives than busy hands. (ii) She is a good provider. "She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar." (v. 14.) Her economy (and perhaps the share she has in the making or saving of money) enables her to put on her table not only the common domestic produce of her own garden, but even the luxuries and dainty things imported by the foreign traders. She does not send out ships herself, but she is able to purchase that which they bring in from foreign markets. She does her own marketing, and thinks what will please and gratify her husband when he comes home for his dinner, and gives him a good and dainty breakfast to cheer him and content him before he goes out to his day's work

or business. What she has earned or saved by laying her hand to the spindle and holding the distaff (v. 19) enables her to do this. If she does not make more than she buys, she at least saves much money by herself doing with her own hands what an idle woman would spend in wages to some other woman to do for her. She is her own dressmaker. (v. 22.) Nowadays the making of a gown costs as much or more than the material out of which it is made. This prudent and industrious wife saves that outlay, even though it be at the expense of the afternoon's novel-reading or the gossiping visits of her equally idle neighbors. (iii) She looks after her own servants. "She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens." (v. 15.) Much of the waste of modern family life grows out of the habit of leaving all things to the servants. This woman does not lie idly in bed till the cook and the parlor-maid have gotten the breakfast and laid the table, but is up early in the morning, and herself gives out her materials for the breakfast, and arranges the household work for the day, allotting to each servant (if she have them) her task. (iv) She is not afraid of household work herself. "She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms." (v. 17.) Most women nowadays are too dainty to do housework; but this woman is not content to do needlework alone, but she tucks up her dress and bares her arms, and is not afraid either to make a bed or sweep a room. Thereby she sets a good example to her servants and her daughters, and conserves her own physical health and strength. She is all the happier in mind and stronger in body for thus strengthening herself. (v) She is no careless idler. "She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness." (v. 27.) The personal supervision of her household, and the cheerful way in which she lays a hand to the work of it, encourage her servants and give good training to her daughters, and contribute both to the family happiness and to wealth. (vi) She takes good care of the personal comfort of her household. "She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet." (v. 21.) Her industry has made her forehanded, both in weaving cloth and making it up during the summer into good warm clothing for the winter. The scarlet here spoken of has reference not only to the color but the texture of the cloth. Good warm clothes are provided and ready when the winter brings the snow and cold. She is not taken unawares or unprepared. There is no rush and worry for the winter clothing; her industry has made her provident. Even her husband has had a share in her careful provision

for clothing. He is known in the gates as one of the best and most comfortably dressed men in the town. (vii) She is not unmindful either of the beauty of her house or the proper adornment of her own body. "She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple." (v. 22.) A handsomely furnished house and a well-dressed wife are pride and joy to her husband. This industrious and virtuous woman has been able to provide both these things. Her taste and handiwork have hung her house with pleasant tapestries, and her thrift and skill have enabled her to clothe herself in silk and purple. If her attire is not gaudy, it is at least of rich material which well becomes her, and makes her husband proud both of her good appearance and of the means by which she has come by it, as to the material and the making.

3. In respect of the family wealth.—This good woman, being industrious and thrifty in the management of her household, has developed good business ability as well. "She considereth a field, and buyeth it." (v. 16.) In the meantime she has been thinking that it might be well to add a little to the family property. There is a neighboring field for sale. She has well considered it. She speaks to her husband and suggests the propriety of buying it. Perhaps he is not quite able to do so; but she surprises him by telling him that she has some savings of her own, with which she is enabled to stock the new bit of ground. "With the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard." (v. 16.) "She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night." (v. 18.) Having made more articles of domestic use with her spinning-wheel and her needle, she has found that they have a good market value, and was very proud when she discovered that the merchants were eager to buy them of her. Thus getting a taste of the joy of earning as well as saving money, she went on even after the daylight had gone, and by candle-light kept at work. This candle-light work did not prevent her from being a good companion to her husband. The work of a woman's fingers does not prevent the use of her tongue, and no doubt many a pleasant evening passed between husband and wife while she worked away with her hands, and they talked and "took sweet counsel together." "She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant." (v. 24.) When the husband and wife work together for the common wealth, there is more wealth and more happiness than when the husband alone is the bread-winner and the wife the spendthrift of the family. With this kind of joint thrift and economy she, as well as he, is "clothed with strength and honor," and "in time to come," when working

days are over, they may both "rejoice" that they have enough for their old age and to give their children a good start in life. (v. 25.)

4. In relation to the poor.—"She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy." (v. 20.) Industrious and thrifty, she is yet no miserly, close-fisted niggard. Thankful for her own health and plenty, she is happy to be able to help the poor and needy. She does not simply give to them when they seek her help, but she "stretcheth out her hand," reaching out to do them good. This is true charity. She stayed at home to save and make money by her economy and thrift, and then went abroad to distribute to the poor. She fulfilled the apostolic exhortation to labor, working with her hands that she might have, not only to keep, but to give to them that need. (Eph. iv, 28.) More than that, she made good investments in this way, remembering the words that he that "hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord," and that other beautiful promise of the Psalmist, which runs, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor," etc. (Ps. xli, 1-3.)

5. She is wise in counsel.—Some may think that this woman so industrious and thrifty was nothing more than a household drudge; but we are told that "she openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness." (v. 26.) Domestic virtue and household industry do not mean intellectual neglect. This woman was as cultured as well as a wise and kind woman. Her advice was sought by her husband and neighbors, and when she spoke it was not with superior censoriousness, but all her advice and counsel were given under the law of kindness. A woman who knows how to guide her own household well, and come thriftily through life, keep the love of her husband and the respect of her children, knows how to advise others.

III.—THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN HAD IN HONOR.

Virtue is said to be its own reward, and so it is; but there are other rewards besides, and this woman had them abundantly.

1. Her children rose up around her, and called her blessed. (v. 28.)—That is a happy mother who retains the love, respect, and admiration of her children. "I owe all that I am in the world to my mother, God bless her," I heard a young man say recently. "I ought to be the happiest and most grateful girl in the world, for I have a saint for a mother," wrote a young lady to me recently.

2. Her husband also blesses and praises her.—Nothing is more grateful to a good woman than the hearty praises of her hus-

band. The husband of the virtuous woman joins with his children in blessing their mother, and he is hearty in her praise. She is more than all the world to him, and there is no woman like her. "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all." (v. 29.) This is high praise, and she well deserves it.

3. Her own works praise her.—"Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates." (v. 31.) She well enjoys what she hath wrought and won by her virtue and industry, and her charities and good deeds are known in the city where she lives.

4. The ground of her praise.—"Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord she shall be praised." (v. 30.) If a woman hopes to win the permanent praise of her husband and children and the people of her town on the ground of her wealth or beauty, she will find these possessions may fail her. If a man sets his hopes of happiness either on favor or beauty, his life will be wrecked, most likely; "but a woman that feareth the Lord she shall be praised." Thus we see that the Book of Proverbs ends as it began: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

XXIII.

REVERENCE AND FIDELITY.—Eccles. v, 1-12.

(1) Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. (2) Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. (3) For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words. (4) When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. (5) Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. (6) Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? (7) For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God. (8) If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they. (9) Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field. (10) He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity. (11) When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? (12) The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.—Eccles. v, 1-12.

After all that critics have said and done, and they have handled this book of Solomon as well as the other two, as if the main purpose of criticism was to show that every received tradition of the Church, whether Jewish or Christian, is unfounded simply because it is Jewish or Christian, there is yet no solid reason for doubting that Ecclesiastes is the production of the wise king the son of David. That it differs in style from Proverbs and the Song of Solomon is as true as that the subject-matter of it is different from either. But it should be remembered that this theme is different, and the time of life at which he wrote these serious reflections was different from that in which he spoke his Proverbs or composed his Song of Songs. As for the general interpretation of Ecclesiastes, it is pretty certain that, being composed in his later years, it is the mature reflections of the great king, who had seen the vanity and folly of all things under the sun (taken and used apart from God) as furnishing

in themselves sources or even means of true happiness. By some it has been thought that this book was the utterance of Solomon as a penitent backslider; but in it there is no distinct confession of sin, no appeal to God for the forgiveness of past sins or even errors. It is rather a philosophical treatise on the inadequacy of a mere earthly and worldly life to secure happiness for the soul; wealth, honor, and pleasure, all learning and all human culture, cannot, either separately or combined, fill up the measure of the soul's need at the time of its greatest crisis, or even fully satisfy it at any time. The general lesson is that the human soul, made in the image of God, even though alienated and fallen from him, is still overmade for this world, and will find all things "under the sun" too small to meet its great need and fill up its capacity for happiness. The fountain-head of the soul's true river of life and of pleasure is not "under the sun," but above it, where God dwelleth. Wise Matthew Henry says Ecclesiastes is (i) a sermon, (ii) a penitential sermon, (iii) a practical and profitable sermon.

I.—THE VANITY OF A HEARTLESS RELIGION.

Having passed under review all the sources of pleasure and profit in this world and found them all vanity, the preacher turns at last, with a little, faint light burning in his darkened, gloomy, and discouraged soul, to the house of God and to the worship of God as the only possible place and means by which the soul may find even the least hope and satisfaction in this life. But even here he is met with the thought that in religion there is so much sham and hypocrisy that if any good at all is to come from it, it must be through a diligent training of the heart to hear and of the hands to obey the Word of God. Perhaps Solomon in his depression turned his thoughts back to that noble structure which in his youth he reared to God and dedicated with such pomp; remembering at once how tender his heart then was, how sincerely he had made his vows, how in later life he became formal in his worship and had broken his vows in going after vanities, and how these had failed him and deceived him. Now in his old age he turns again, both for himself and others, to that house. But remembering the danger of a half-hearted or insincere worship, he cautions against anything short of a whole-hearted, serious, and upright service of God. Otherwise, even the house of God and his worship will prove vanity, as everything else had done in his experience. God is man's only hope; but even *this* is a vain one unless the heart is sincere and the hand

strong to "pay its vows." This disappointed king has been walking through a long, dark night; his faith has almost failed; sometimes it seems to have done so entirely; the darkness has been unrelieved through the night; but now he sees a faint light in the distance and takes heart again, but dares not be over-confident. Still, it is a rising light and will lead on to the morning after the night.

1. Reverence enjoined in worship.—Our only hope in this life is to be found in communion with God. He only is the satisfactory explanation of all things. He only has the remedy for all human ills, especially the ills of the soul and of "a mind diseased." He only is the reader of the riddles of life and the winder aright of its "tangled skein." But this remedy, the worship of God, is not to be had by rushing at it heedlessly, insincerely, or half-heartedly. "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God." The house of God in the days of Solomon was the place of his earthly dwelling. There his presence was manifested. That was the place where he had appointed to meet his people. The house of God with us to-day is only the place of formal worship. It is not in "this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem" that we now worship God, but in spirit, with our hearts turned to him wherever we are. Still, when we go to church we are supposed to be deliberately undertaking an act of solemn worship, and our motives and our actions are to be narrowly scrutinized and carefully ordered. When God called Moses in the wilderness out of the burning bush, he approached the place where God had come down to meet him, curiously and perhaps a little irreverently. God stopped him with a word which may fairly interpret the injunction of Solomon in this passage. "Draw not nigh hither" (that is, as you are, too hastily and without consideration): "put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." (Ex. iii, 5; Josh. v, 15.) This does not mean that we are to draw nigh to God either slowly or reluctantly; only that, when we do, we are to ponder well the object of our going, and to approach him reverently and sincerely. Too many go to the house of God without consideration; lightly, as though they were only going into man's house. Too many go to the house of God only to hear what man hath to say, and not what God the Lord shall speak to them out of his Word. Too many go only to meet and to see other people, with little or no thought of God at all. Such a going to the house of God is unworthy of a spiritual creature, and an insult to God himself, and can only do harm and not good to a man. There is enough to be considered in drawing near to God to occupy the serious attention of the whole man, body, soul, and spirit. Our

going should be decorous, our attention to the Word or worship attentive, and our spiritual attitude humble and reverent.

2. Hearing and doing the Word of God.—The primary object of attending the house of God in our day is to hear his Word rather than to perform mere acts of worship. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” (Rom. x, 17.) “Without faith it is impossible to please God,” therefore we should give the closest attention to the reading and the exposition of God’s Word by the teacher or preacher whom he hath given for the purpose of instruction and edification. (Eph. iv, 11–13.) A fine example of the fulfillment of this kingly injunction is to be seen in the manner in which the people listened to the preaching of Ezra (Neh. viii, 3), where we are told that “the ears of the people were attentive to the law” as it was expounded to them by the man who “had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord,” and to teach it. (Ezra vii, 10.) Where there is such a preacher, and such hearers as those returned exiles, there will the Spirit of the Lord be upon the people. Our Lord himself has given us frequent injunctions to hear the Word of God attentively, for out of it in connection with the attitude of the heart are the issues of life. “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” “Have ye understood all these things?” “He that heareth my Word . . . hath everlasting life.” (Matt. xiii, 9, 51; John v, 24.) It was by careless hearing that the Jews lost the sense of their Scriptures, and “their hearts grew fat,” so that they could not hear and understand the truth. (Matt. xiii, 13–16; John xii, 40; Acts xxviii, 26, 27; II. Cor. iii, 14, 15.) There is nothing so deadening to the soul as to hear the Word of God, or read it, heedlessly. The words “be more ready to hear” are by some translated “be ready to obey.” Certainly the hearing of the Word of God without obedience is but the mockery of hearing. “Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” (James i, 22.)

3. A warning against formalism.—In contrast with a reverent and obedient *hearing* and *doing* of the Word, he speaks of “the sacrifice of fools,” who “consider not that they do evil.” There may be here an allusion to the sin and folly of King Saul, who, instead of obeying the Word of God, offered a vain and ostentatious sacrifice to him, which brought out the rebuke of Samuel: “Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” (I. Sam. xv, 22.) Saul lost his kingdom because he heard but did not obey the Word, but brought instead the sacrifice of a fool, or a vain sacrifice. The people of

Israel likewise offended in this wise, to the destruction of their nation. (Is. i, 10-15.) So to-day, under cover of a more spiritual worship there is much sacrifice of folly in the house of God. It is pitiful to see multitudes of vain people flocking to the house of God and going through the forms of worship: bowing their heads upon the pew-backs on entering the church; standing up to sing; kneeling down while the prayer is being uttered; listening with wandering thoughts while the Word is being read or expounded; and then going out straightway to forget everything they have heard, and without the least intention of doing it. The curse of the day in religion is this sacrifice of fools—a mere vain and empty formalism in religion, without the power of the Spirit.

4. Against empty and hasty speech in religious matters.—“Be not rash with thy mouth.” This is a solemn exhortation against hasty, ill-considered, and insincere religious speech or profession. If a man is not sincerely seeking God, he had better refrain from singing hymns or making prayers. Even many good people are guilty of this sin. They talk and pray rashly—make great declaration of their religious feelings and hasty professions of their purposes. One of the great sins of Israel was that the people drew near to God with their lips while their hearts were far from him. (Matt. xv, 8.) Lip service is one of the worst abominations to God. Either in prayer, profession, or in the making of vows, one has great need to consider carefully his words. “Let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God.” One sometimes trembles to hear loud confessions of sin in prayer, when there seems to be no corresponding humility or penitence in the life; to hear vehement protestations of love for God, when the whole life is almost destitute of any evidence of love to man; to hear one singing lustily:

“Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in thee I find”—

and then behold after the hymn a worldly, careless, greedy, grasping, selfish pursuit of the pleasures and profits of the world, with no compensating acts of generous beneficence. Even when there is heart sincerity in prayer or profession, in testimony or vows of consecration, one should be careful not to let his mouth run away with his heart, or allow his words to smother his careful thought. Even our heart must be disciplined and kept with all diligence, for it is a deceitful member, and much plausible wickedness lies concealed in it. (Jer. xvii, 9.) As the mouth must not be rash, so the heart must not be hasty. “Quick to hear and slow to speak”

is better than "Quick to speak and slow to do." Much of the ill-considered speech grows out of an irreverent habit of assuming that God is altogether such an one as we are ourselves; that it is not indecorous or irreverent to rush into his presence and speak in his presence and in his name as we would in the presence of mere mortal men. Indeed, there is often more thoughtfulness and reverence in the presence of distinguished men than in the presence of God. Remember that "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." To disregard this wise rule is to "do evil." This does not mean that we are not to come boldly into the presence of God, and open our mouths wide and ask largely that our joy may be full; that we are never to make long prayers if there be need; but that we are not to juggle with words without meaning and sincerity, as the Pharisees did (Matt. vi, 7), and rattle on in our talk with thoughtless irreverence or vain insincerity, thinking that by our much speaking we shall get the ear of God and secure his arm. We cannot but remember how Jesus spent whole nights in prayer to God, and we remember the long prayers of Solomon, as well as the short ones of Nehemiah. Men who have been given up to a multitude of conflicting businesses oftentimes spend the night in confused dreaming, much of which is meaningless and senseless. So there are those whose words pour out of their mouths as idle dreams without connection, rhyme, or reason. Their words ramble in prayer, as their thoughts ramble all over the world and back to their business or pleasure, while listening to the Word. "A fool's voice is known by the multitude of words." That is, not only by the number of them, but by the character and manner of them. Nothing is more distressing, disgusting, and harm-working than religious "havering."

II.—AGAINST RASH VOWS.

There is a healthy and wise caution against making hasty vows to God.

1. Vows are lawful.—"When thou vowest" does not imply that one should never make a vow to God. Sometimes a man finds that a vow helps him over a weak place, by binding his purpose, as it were, to the throne of God and enlisting in a solemn manner the help of God. But the caution here is that a vow is a solemn matter, and if it is made it must be paid. "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it." Not only must the vow be paid, but it must be paid promptly. To defer to pay a vow is to suffer a weaken-

ing of the purpose to pay it, and to incur the danger of breaking it altogether. Do not seek either to evade or to postpone it. To make a vow to God and then to defer its payment, not to say to avoid it, is to demonstrate yourself a fool. God does not require your vows; he is quite content with a reverent and honest service without these bonds; yet if you feel that your purpose may be strengthened by a vow, make the vow, only it is far better not to make it than not to fulfill it. "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin." This is against rash vows made without consideration, and the fulfilling of which might be greater sin than the keeping of them, as in the case of Herod, who made his rash vow to Salome, and then for the sake of consistency committed a horrible murder. "Neither say thou before the angel that it was an error." By the angel here is meant possibly the priest, or the "guardian angel," or the "angel of the covenant," in whose presence, either bodily or spiritually, the vow was made. There is no doubt that some hasty vows are foolishly made, and it is as well to break them as to keep them; they are "more honored in the breach than in the observance," but in such a case there is a shameful confession to be made. One must in such a case go to God and say: "Lord, I was foolish; I was mistaken; and now I must recall my vow." God did not ask it, and if it was a foolish vow he will not require it of thee; but why put thyself in this inconsistent position and cause people who have known thy vow to misunderstand thee?

2. The breach of some vows is dangerous.—"Wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thy hands?" Some men make vows to God, as Jacob did, that if prosperity comes a certain portion of the increase shall be given to God. It is a kind of bargain. Then when the prosperity comes the vow is forgotten, and God is angry and sends calamity upon this covenant-breaker. Perhaps the anger here spoken of is aroused at the thought that God will make such bargains with men, who vow for their own profit and then think to cheat God. Some men on beds of sickness make vows that if God will raise them up they will serve him, and then being spared they straightway forget their vows or tear them into bits. With such God is angry and will most likely blast all future works of their hands.

3. Dreams and the fear of God.—"For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God." This verse is probably explanatory of many of these foolish vows which are made and broken. A multitude of false prophets teach many words and make vain promises and exact vows; super-

stitious people get to indulge and cultivate dreams and follow them, seeking to guide their lives and direct their business by them. These usually come to confusion and involve in trouble and shame the superstitious followers of these vain words and silly dreams, which are only the unconscious movings of an overtaxed or ill-directed brain. On the other hand, the king gives a bit of solidly good advice: "Fear thou God." Attend carefully to his Word, rely upon his grace, and diligently do his will. In such a case you will not need to make a vow, nor will you incur the danger of breaking one.

III.—THE PERVERSION OF JUSTICE AND THE VANITY OF RICHES.

Here are two things which the king speaks of that are worth considering.

1. **The perversion of justice.**—"If thou see the oppression of the poor," etc., "marvel not at the matter." This probably referred to the extortion of taxes by the collectors; but a wider application of it may be made in our day, when the rich oppress the poor and grind down their faces in order to get rich at their cost. Well, it all looks wrong, and it is wrong, and we wonder why God allows it. "Marvel not at it." Do not be surprised that wicked men do these things. What more is to be expected from the greedy, grasping, cruel selfishness of man? "Marvel not at it." Do not think with wonder that God has not seen, or has forgotten to be just. There are courts of appeal on the earth, and there is a final court of appeal in heaven, before which every act of injustice done on the earth, and for which restitution has not been made, will come up for settlement. Just as one satrap is over another and the king over all, so God is over all kings—the very highest authority. As the action of human courts in cases of appeal is slow, so God acts slowly, but he always acts surely and justly. There are two worlds in which to make things right. "Shall not God avenge his own elect, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." Marvel not, and "fret not thyself because of evil-doers." (Ps. xxxvii, 1.) Correct an evil when you can, but do not despair because you cannot bring all things right in this world, and do not distrust God because he does not put things right as fast as you think he ought. God's mill grinds slowly, but it grinds surely: "Marvel not."

2. **The vanity of riches.**—All men are alike dependent upon the providence of God. Even the king is dependent upon the earth for his riches and power, just as much as the peasant is. If the

farmer fails, the merchant fails; if the merchant fails, the king fails. Let us remember that all men are on a common footing before God. This is why all things will come out right at last. The differences between man and man, the prosperity of the rich and the poverty of the poor, are superficial differences after all, and as temporary as they are superficial. "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase." There is a great delusion in riches, so far as a man's peace of mind and quiet of heart is concerned. "This is also vanity." With the increase of goods comes an increase of all manner of expenses—more servants, a larger house, more dependent friends and relatives, more hangers-on, more beggars, more attacks on the riches, and a thousand and one worries that more than overbalance all the satisfaction afforded by the riches. That which is over and above what can be readily and rightly used and hoarded up can afford no satisfaction beyond that of the miser's—"the beholding of them with their eyes." Upon the whole, the lot of the laboring-man is better than that of the rich, whether he have a bare sufficiency or an abundance on his table. He at least can sleep without a care, whereas the worries connected with the getting and keeping of wealth drives sleep from the eyes of many a rich man. "Be content with such things as ye have."

XXIV.

THE CREATOR REMEMBERED.—Eccles. xii, 1-7, 13, 14.

(1) Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; (2) While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: (3) In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, (4) And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low; (5) Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: (6) Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. (7) Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. (13) Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. (14) For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.—Eccles. xii, 1-7, 13, 14.

Whether Ecclesiastes was written in the old age of Solomon, or by some wise man during or just at the close of the captivity, in the days of Ezra or Nehemiah, is a question which scholars may discuss. It has no important place in these pages. Whether the book is the lamentations of a backslider or the philosophical meditations of a man who was desirous of putting his readers on the quest for the only true good to be found in this world, are two points of interpretation. The meaning in the book may be found and truly learned, whichever standpoint we take, either as to authorship or intention. It is certain that, taking the book altogether, there is in it a quest after good "under the sun," and a failure to find it in any created thing or in any earthly pursuit. The writer takes us through the ways of wisdom, the pursuit of business, the love of pleasure, the lust of power, and only at last, when he comes to the house of God, and to God himself, is there any satisfaction to be found. And that not in connection with a mere ritual service, but a reverent desire to accept life as the gift of God, the earth as a sphere of present opportunity, in which to do good to one's self and

to one's neighbor, unselfishly and lovingly, nothing doubting the issues of such a life—casting our bread upon the waters, “giving a portion to seven,” not prying curiously into the too mysterious secrets of God in creation before going to work and using the forces of nature lying around us, sowing our seed morning and evening, not knowing which shall prosper, this or that. This only is the true philosophy of life. The sunlight is pleasant and youth is sweet, yet the darkness will come in the end. Youth will give way to old age, and life itself will in the end, like all things else, be found to be vanity. He would not have the young man go with low-hanging head because all human things fail of meeting the great wants and aspirations of the soul, nor because darkness comes after the day, and death follows upon life even when a man has lived many years. On the other hand, he would have the youth who has found in God the true rest, rejoice in the days of his youth, and be happy-hearted, letting his eyes delight themselves in beauty and his heart in all things that make glad youthful days, even when much disappointment and sorrow is seen all around, much wrong is done, and misfortunes which have no explanation come—confident that God will bring us into the judgment of his righteousness, when the good will be rewarded, and the evil avenged. (xi, 9.) God is over all, and his judgment extends to everything. The world, after all, is not a misshapen, haphazard accident of blind forces, and the issues of it are not uncertain. God is over all, and judgment is coming to set all wrong things right and to make all right things shine gloriously. This is the bright and hopeful ending of the book up to the end of the eleventh chapter. At least, so I think the book should be read. Man's soul is too big for this world; yet let him make the best of the good that is in it, get all the happiness out of it he can, not as the miserable, unbelieving epicure does, but as the happy believer in God and the life to come ought to do.

I.—A GODLY YOUTH CONTRASTED WITH A GOD- LESS OLD AGE.

The last verse of the eleventh chapter is not a sarcasm upon the vanities and follies of youth, but a picture of happy and hopeful life when there is a real and reverent fear of God in the heart. It is only as we remember this that we can understand the meaning of the first verse of our present study. That is, if thou wouldst rejoice in thy youth and delight thyself in the light of thine eyes and in the happy ways of the heart, then “remember thy Creator in the days

of thy youth," lest the evil days of a godless old age come upon thee and the storm of death and judgment overtake thee and find thee unprepared.

1. Youthful piety enjoined.—I have never seen an old Christian regret that he gave his heart to God in the days of his youth. I have never seen an old sinner but that he regretted he did not become a Christian when young. The advice of the wise preacher is (i) To "remember the Creator." That is, to think on him and take him into one's heart as well as one's thoughts. To make anything else than him the object of thought and possession as the chief good is to blunder in all life to come. Knowledge, the pursuit of business, wealth, pleasure, and earthly power will all prove vanity in the end. They are essentially unsatisfying in themselves, and the condition under which they may be enjoyed at best will rapidly pass away, and leave all life a miserable bankrupt concern; but with God in the thoughts and in the heart the soul may always have pleasure in this world, whether the quest after worldly things is successful or is disappointing. (ii) It is the Creator who is set before the thought of youth. Perhaps in our day we would more particularly emphasize the thought of God as a Redeemer and Saviour. We would say, "Remember Jesus." But "thy Creator is thy Redeemer," and we do not dishonor Jesus when we remember that "all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made" which appears in this world. How can we enjoy or make the best of this world if it is not remembered that it is God's world, and not the devil's world or a world of chance? Our life, with all the powers of body, soul, and spirit, is the work of the Creator. The world and all things herein, its sunshine and shadow, its light and darkness, its flowers and its food, are God's gifts to us. If we look above us into the face of the sunlight, or the starlit sky, we may be glad that these are the works of his hands; if we look beneath us and behold the earth carpeted with flowers and waving with the fruits of the field and the vineyard, these also are God's gifts. More and more as we grow older, the thought of God as the Creator becomes a great delight. If we have him in fellowship with us by "remembering him," there is an added delight in everything. Does any one imagine that the sun shines less brightly because he remembers God? or that the flowers are less beautiful because God made them? or that food is less sweet to the taste because God has fitted them to our bodily necessities and given us appetites with which to enjoy them? Are our friends less dear to us because they, too, are God's children? Do the grand mountains lose their grandeur

because they remind us of his righteousness, or the sea its wonders and glory because he holds its waters in the hollow of his hand? Even the mysteries of evil and suffering which are in the world become more bearable when we remember God, and that he is over all and doubtless will unravel these mysteries to us. The poisonous weed ceases to be an evil when it is guaranteed by the sweet flower that grows at its side; the hiss of the deadly cobra does not terrify us so much when we remember the note of the song-bird; the storm and tempest, the rush of clouds and the flash of the lightning, are less terrible when we remember the happy sunshine and the soft evening breeze, the glories of the morning and the evening when they blush upon the low-lying eastern and western horizons. Without God all these things would be hopeless confusion, meaningless contradictions, and the sarcasm of blind and brutal force making unintelligible sport of the world above our heads and beneath our feet. (iii) "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth," because then the heart is tender and childlike and less liable to evil suggestion of wicked temptations and the teachings of bad men; because if we remember him in our youth we are less likely to forget him in our manhood; because if we remember him in our youth we shall have him as a companion in our thoughts and heart all through the journey of life. I once knew a little boy who had a wise and learned father. That little fellow always begged his father to go with him and his little fellows when they went for a day's walk in the country. "Because father knows how to do everything, and can tell us all about the flowers and the rocks and the things everywhere." So God in our youth, as the companion of our early life, will make the world beautiful and true to our otherwise blind eyes and ignorant hearts. Because if we remember God in our youth he will not forget us in our old age; if we remember him when we are full of young life he will not forget us when the work of decay and the storm of death comes down upon us. This leads us up to the next thought.

2. A godless old age set forth.—"While the evil days come not." The first seven verses after the first exhortation to remember the Creator are devoted to a graphic description of the miseries of a godless old age, and the terrors of death and judgment to the man who has forgotten his Creator and lived only in the "vanity of vanities" of the life that now is, without God. The picture is a composite one, and the two conditions are joined and mingled together. That the wise teacher has death in mind, after old age, or as well as old age, is clearly evident from the fifth and seventh verses,

where he speaks of man "going to his long home" and the body "returning to the earth as it was, and the spirit returning to God who gave it." (i) The miseries of a godless old age. He first speaks of the evil days of old age coming, when the soul has no pleasures in the things and ways of the world which so rejoice the heart of the young man. (xi, 9; xii, 1-2.) There is no more beautiful sight in the world than a happy old man, who from the days of his youth has remembered his Creator, waiting peacefully for his great change to come. On the other hand, there is nothing more pitiable than to see an old man, the pleasures of youth all gone; the sun and the light and the moon and the stars, which show the handiwork of the glorious Creator, all darkened, because he sees not in them the work of God's hand. The storm of life has passed, and yet there is looming on his horizon the darkness of coming clouds, which bode another storm, this time of death and destruction. His heart is hard; unbelief has become the habit of his soul; an hundred infidelities which he had encouraged now fail him, and "the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies." Oh, miserable, infidel old age, who would willingly face it? "Without God, without hope, without excuse, and without remedy." Even a good man who knows God suffers the loss of the pleasures of youth, as did good Barzillai. "I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women?" (II. Sam. xix, 35.) If this be so with good old age what must it be to godless old age? Only last night I was sitting quietly reading in my bungalow (here in Burmah), and there came to my ears the sound of revelry from a lot of gay and happy young men living together in a "chummery" across the way, singing, dancing, roistering, and rollicking, in pure delight of youth and high spirits. I am not yet an old man, but I could but think how little pleasure there is now in those things, though twenty-five years ago I would have been first in them. The change was in myself, the change which years bring. I could scarce refrain from happy tears at the thought that though these days were come upon me when I take no more pleasure in such things, yet a quiet and blessed peace was reigning in my heart; and I thanked God that I had remembered my Creator in the days of my youth, and now he was keeping watch and ward over the autumn of my life. No cloud after rain was coming up over against my hope; the light was still in the day and the sun and moon and stars, because the glory of God was shining through them from afar. Old days are evil days to the godless. (ii) The tempest of death. The beautiful and

highly poetical passage in the verses here being considered (3-7) has been variously interpreted. Most modern commentators interpret them as an allegorical picture of the decay of the physical powers under the breath of old age. But it is most likely that they are but a parable of death under the figure of a summer storm bursting over an Eastern village or city—similar, indeed, to the parable of our Lord. (Matt. vii, 24-27.) The city is built with narrow streets between the houses; there has already been rain, but the sky has cleared and the people are out and about again. The keepers are at the doors of the houses of the wealthy; the women are sitting at their latticed windows looking abroad with their eyes where their feet may not come; strong men are about the streets; the hum of the grinding mills is heard everywhere as the women are preparing the flour for the evening meal. Others are singing in the gladness of their hearts, or these same grinders are singing to while and lighten the tedium of their hard and monotonous labor; the wealthy and idle men are seated in their cool gardens picking their fruits and eating the locusts (grasshoppers), well prepared with almonds and caper-berries. Suddenly the clouds, which cleared away but an hour ago when the rain ceased, have come up again; a fierce tempest rushes down from the heights above; the clouds are split with a red and ragged flame of lightning; the thunder roars and bursts with deafening peal upon the ear; the rain pours down in torrents and is swept into the doors of the houses. At this the guards at the front of the houses, loyal to their post yet, tremble; strong men bow themselves as if to avoid the crashing thunder or to escape the forked lightning as it leaps out of the sky; the grinding women cease from their work, so that there are few left to grind; and the hum of the mill, which erstwhile filled all the street, is low; the ladies have fled from their latticed windows; the doors of the houses are shut, and the men spring up from their couches and leave the spiced locusts; the sweet almond and the caper-berry (the appetizing portion which creates desire for food) are forgotten. The birds fly shrieking or whistling through the air, seeking shelter or rejoicing in the storm. Men and women look up with eyes of thought, and fear the destruction which is coming down upon them from on high, that is, out of the heavens. Such a storm have I seen here in the East, and every detail here set forth is true to life. This is the parable of death and judgment. That it is so is apparent from the allusions to the "mourners that go about the streets" and the beautiful parables contained in the reference to the cord, bowl, and pitcher. Death will come at last, and if it come to those who know not God, how

miserable it will be! The beautiful lamp that hangs suspended by a silver chain will fall at last from the ceiling, though it has hung long; and the golden bowl, or the bowl that holds the golden oil, will be broken; the pitcher that has gone often to the fountain will one day be broken; and the earthen water-jars that furnish the beautiful wheel at the cistern will also be broken. All these things have I seen in this beautiful East. So will death at last overtake every man. Life's silver cord will snap, the bowl that holds the mysteries of life will be broken, the pitcher will be crushed, and the wheel of the body's activities will cease its functions. "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Alas for that man who shall be overtaken by death without God in his remembrance! Life, even to old age and with all its possibilities, will then be seen to be vanity. (v. 8.)

II.—THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER.

The search after the satisfying portion is over. All "under the sun" without God "is vanity." God remembered in youth, life with the hope of immortality, and the world enjoyed with God in fellowship, is the only possible good in this world, and that is "very good." The preacher justifies his wisdom to his readers by having taught the people this knowledge, and in searching all the wise proverbs and setting them forth in attractive words so that all might hear and understand these things. The words of wise teachers are like goads and stakes: the goad to urge on the too conservative man, and the stake to hold down as a tent-cord the too progressive; to regulate wild thought as well as to stimulate slow thought. Both the old conservatism and the new radicalism is from the same Shepherd of souls. Wise men do well in teaching both to hold with the old and march with the new thought which God is giving forth to us in this day as well as in the day of this wise preacher. The end is to be instructed in the truest wisdom. This wisdom is not found in the multitude of books or in the wearying study of them. God has set forth the truth to us in his revelation, written in the Book of books, in the wide world of creation, and in the heart and conscience of man. The end is to study them wisely and truly, with a heart open to God, and to practice the truth and wisdom gained therefrom diligently. Now what is the conclusion of the whole matter?

1. To fear God.—"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," saith the first chapter of Proverbs; so it is the middle and end of wisdom. So saith the concluding words of Ecclesiastes. To fear

God is not to be afraid of him, but to reverence and recognize him as the Creator and Author of all good, as the Judge of all the earth, who is doing all for the best. To deny God is to prove one's self to be a fool. To doubt God is to show that one has never known God. To be afraid of God is to prove that one's heart is not right and one's life has been given to folly. For why should one be afraid of God unless his own heart condemn him? To ignore God and seek to get the highest good out of his world is to play the ingrate and the thief. For has not God made us, and not we ourselves, and has not God made the world and blessed it for man's use and given it to him with all things in it richly to enjoy? To fling ourselves out of his hands is to do him a cruel and ungrateful wrong, and then to live in his world without thanksgiving is but to return and rob the Father whose house we have abandoned.

2. To keep his commandments.—Not to become a slavish legalist like the Pharisee, nor a formalist like silly men and women who think that by parading themselves in the house of God with idle ceremonies they can honor God; but by setting one's heart to find out the will of our Father in heaven, and to have a *willing will* to do that will as we find it. Not to serve God by rule and rote, but lovingly, happily, and joyfully. His yoke is easy, his burdens are light, and none of his commands are grievous. The way of the transgressor is hard; but all the ways of wisdom (that is, the commandments of God) are "ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Whether in the highway of public life or in the byway of private life, to fear God and keep his commandments is the whole duty of man. The way to find these ways and paths and to walk in them is to seek wisdom and light from him who is the Light of the world and the Wisdom of God, even Jesus.

3. The judgment.—The wisdom of thus submitting to God and taking him into our hearts and lives and leaving him out of nothing that we do is set forth in this, that "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." Why should we fear the judgment? Yea, rather, why should we not rejoice in judgment, when all that is wrong shall be put right and all that is right shall be vindicated? Yet because of this judgment and the certainty of it, and its searching character and final decisions, it must appear that there is no folly so great as to leave God out of our lives and rule him out of his own world; and no wisdom so great as to make him Father and Friend as well as Creator and Judge, to enter into life and the world with happy confidence in his ability to guide and take care of us, and to bring us off safely through death and the judgment. Amen. So may it be with you and me.

XXV.

MESSIAH'S KINGDOM.—Malachi iii, 1-12.

(1) Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. (2) But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: (3) And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. (4) Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years. (5) And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts. (6) For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. (7) Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? (8) Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. (9) Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. (10) Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. (11) And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts. (12) And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord of hosts.—Malachi iii, 1-12.

Malachi was the last of that long line of prophets who had foretold the coming of the Just One, who was to bring to this world both justice and mercy. This prophecy was uttered about four hundred years before the coming of Christ, after which, until our Lord's appearance, God spoke not again to his people, though he did not cease to watch over them. After the Jews returned from their long captivity and had rebuilt their Temple, they experienced considerable disappointment. Their ancient glory as a nation did not reappear. They were comparatively a feeble people, and the surrounding nations and tribes oppressed and harried them more or less. They carried on their Temple-worship, but they did it drearily, hope-

lessly, negligently. They withheld from God many of the tithes and offerings prescribed by the law. Some were neglectful of religion altogether. Many had divorced their Jewish wives and married heathen women. There was a party of purist or puritans springing up, who afterward blossomed into the Pharisees and Sadducees of our Lord's day, who were at the same time querulous and full of complaint against God; against his justice, against his providence, and against his faithfulness. They were angry that God did not punish the heathen around, and that his providential care seemed to be as much over them as over his own people. Their "Where is the God of judgment?" (ii, 17) was much such a cry as is heard on the lips of many Christians now, and will be more and more characteristic of the unbelief which will creep over and almost fill the Church in the last days: "Where is the promise of his coming?" This prophecy is taken up largely with rebukes leveled at the people—not the Gentiles; yet God is careful to vindicate his long-suffering and tender love toward them.

I.—THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT.

The seventeenth verse of the second chapter seems rightly to be the first verse of the third. It is the introduction to what follows in the third. "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?" If they were not actually saying these things against God, they were acting them. They were pretending that God did not take account of the sins of the heathen, but continued to prosper them and treat them as though they were good people. They were fretting that God did not arise and deliver them out of all their troubles, and restore again the kingdom of Israel and make them a great people. Had he not promised to visit judgment on the heathen, and deliver them, his own people? Why, then, does he not come and fulfill his word? "Where is the God of judgment?" All this time they were profaning his Temple, oppressing the poor and the stranger, marrying heathen wives, and withholding their tithes from the storehouse, and yet they were pretending to be most holy and righteous. We wonder at God's patience with them, just as we wonder oftentimes at his patience with us.

1. The forerunner.—God replies to their complaint, to their question, "Where is the God of judgment?" He will tell them now.

“Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me.” The God of judgment was coming, but in the meantime he would send his runner out in advance, both to give the people warning of his approach and to prepare the way by the first announcements of judgment. This passage refers, first of all, to John the Baptist. It is the repetition of what Isaiah had declared two hundred years before the captivity: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” (Is. xl, 3.) That this passage from Isaiah referred to John the Baptist is evident from Matt. iii, 1; Luke i, 76. John the Baptist was the messenger of Jehovah, sent before the appearing of himself in the person of Christ. The change in the wording when quoted by the evangelist makes it appear as though the words were spoken by God the Father to the Son when sending him into the world as Messiah and Redeemer. That it has a secondary meaning, a reference to Elijah, is also very certain. Malachi refers this saying to Elijah: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” (iv, 5.) It was of Elijah that the Jews understood this prophecy. When they raised this point with our Lord his reply was that the prophecy referred to John; but, “If ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come.” (Matt. xi, 14.) And yet the coming and ministry of John did not exhaust the prophecy. For our Lord says on another occasion: “Elias truly shall first come and restore all things.” (Matt. xvii, 11.) This points to the second advent. John the Baptist was the messenger sent “in the spirit and power of Elias,” as the forerunner of the first advent; but Elijah himself will come as the great messenger and forerunner of Messiah’s second advent.

2. The advent of Messiah.—Having spoken of the forerunning messenger, the prophet next, even in the same breath, speaks of the great Messenger of Jehovah, even the Messenger of the Covenant. “And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his Temple.” Here “the Lord,” or “Jehovah,” is identified with the Messenger of the Covenant. This clearly points to the incarnation of Jesus, or the Eternal Word. This Messenger of the Covenant is no stranger to us. He has appeared again and again during the course of the development of the theocracy and the initial kingdom. As the “Angel of God,” the “Angel of Jehovah,” the “Angel of his Presence,” we recognize him who appeared to Abraham, to Moses, to Joshua, to Gideon, and to Manoah. But the reference here is not to the coming of an Angel (not even the Angel of the Covenant

as of old he appeared), but to the great Messenger of the Covenant, even the Incarnate Word of God, Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah and Redeemer of the world. Those Old Testament appearances were indeed all adumbrations of the Incarnation, and clearly pointed and led up to it. But when Jesus came in the flesh, then all was fulfilled. By the term Covenant is understood the New Covenant, or the Gospel dispensation. Just as Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant, so now Jesus is the Mediator of the New Covenant. (Heb. ix, 15.) "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The Jews were always looking backward for their glory, but God was pointing them forward. The glory of the second Temple, which God declared should be greater than that of the first, was to stand not in outward splendor, but in the fact that Jehovah himself should come to it and administer grace and truth to the people through himself. That Jesus did so come to the Temple was the initial fulfillment of this promise. He came as an infant, when his mother first presented him in the Temple, and was recognized and hailed by good old Simeon and the prophetess Anna; he came again to the Temple when he was twelve years old, and disputed with the doctors, and first began to "be about his Father's business"; later on in the beginning of his public ministry he came as a purifier of the Temple, as we shall see further; and subsequently on many occasions he resorted to the Temple and there taught the people and glorified it with his presence.

3. The suddenness of his coming.—When the whole people were asleep in their dead orthodoxy, studying the law and the prophets indeed with microscopic minuteness, but blind and deaf to all spiritual significance in them, Jesus was born, as it were suddenly. Some pious but humble shepherds were ready for his coming; a few wise men from the East—Gentiles—who had seen "his star," came to greet him, but the rest of the nation were asleep and dead. Then, when he suddenly appeared on the banks of the Jordan, the people were still unprepared; and so, when he actually appeared in the Temple, they asked: "Who art thou?" and "By what authority doest thou these things?" (Matt. xxi, 23; John ii, 18.) Suddenly as Jesus burst upon the nation and appeared in the Temple, it was not more sudden than when he "shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation." (Heb. ix, 28.) "As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." (Matt. xxiv, 27.) And yet the suddenness of his appearing was not because there had not been warning. From the time of the announcement of his advent to the Virgin Mary and

his subsequent birth in Bethlehem, thirty years had passed. If they had been awake the people would not have been taken unawares. Even the preaching of John the Baptist for six months, announcing the appearance of Messiah, did not wake the nation out of sleep. It will be so in the second advent. There will be plenty of warning, but the people will be asleep, and his coming will burst upon them as lightning flashing out of the sky. There is also a touch of satire in this passage. "The Lord whom ye seek . . . whom ye delight in." You say you are seeking him; you say you delight in him; but all this is pretense—mere formal declarations of orthodoxy. You are seeking and delighting not in the spiritual reign of Messiah; you are not longing for him to come with spiritual power to purify you from your sins; you are simply longing for temporal and material splendor and carnal glory. Therefore when he comes, a real Messiah arising on your national horizon with healing in his wings, you will not receive him, in spite of all your professions of love and desire.

II.—THE PURIFIER AND JUDGE.

You pretend to seek him and that you delight in him; and you are saying: "Where is the God of judgment?" as though you were doubting the promise of God and challenging him to fulfill his word. Well, "He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming?" How utterly unprepared the people were for his coming; how they flinched from his teaching; how they cowered under the judgments delivered in his speech; how they shrunk from his scathing rebukes of their hypocrisy and dead formalism!

1. The refiner and fuller.—The object of Messiah's coming, the end of all the promises of God, is not earthly glory, but spiritual purity and personal righteousness. Jesus comes not to glorify human nature, but to save sinners. That is, the glorification of human nature will be accomplished through and by means of its purification. Therefore, before anything else is done, he must do the work of a refiner and a fuller. Sin had alloyed our gold by defiling our natures. With the fire of his word burning in the power of his Spirit he will search out the dross of our sin, and with the cleansing power of that word he will cleanse us. (I. Pet. i, 7; Eph. v, 26.) When we are professing our desire for salvation and our delight in the Lord, are we ready to accept this refining and purifying work of his grace? Or do we, as the Jews did when he entered the Temple

and drove out the money-changers and those that sold doves, resent his administration of righteousness? And yet this is the work of the Lord, to "purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." External worship is hateful to God unless there be internal righteousness to accompany it. When the life is right with God through righteousness and the Spirit of the Lord, then our service is a delight to him. "Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years." We Christians need as much to learn this lesson, by taking it to heart, as the Jews in the days of Malachi did.

2. The Judge.—Not only does he come to purify and cleanse us from our sins, but also to be a swift witness against them, and to visit judgment upon those who deliberately and willfully practice them. "I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts." Jesus indeed came with grace and truth, with forgiveness for all, with the new birth and justification and sanctification for all. But mercy shall not rejoice against judgment. Men who persist in these sins shall be held accountable by the Lord. His administration of grace and judgment go side by side. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God." (Eccles. viii, 11-13.) Here we have an intimation of the future judgment, which will take place at the second advent of the Lord, that "great and dreadful day of the Lord" foreshadowed by Malachi, as it was also by Isaiah. (Is. lxi, 2.) Let not, therefore, the righteous be troubled because the wicked seem to prolong their days and go scot-free of punishment. Their day is coming. On the other hand, let not the wicked boast their immunity from punishment for all their evil which they are doing, even though they be numbered among the people of God. The God of judgment is present in the world, though he bear long with the wicked. Let the widow and the fatherless, the wage-earner and the stranger, never suppose that God has forgotten them. Nay, he has taken them under his special protection, and woe to the men,

be they professed Christians or open sinners, who deal treacherously and cruelly with them! They are God's wards, and he knoweth how to set their wrongs right and requite the evil done to them by their oppressors.

3. Messiah's faithfulness.—The people had complained that God had been untrue to his covenant promises; but he shows them that he had been true to his word. In hastily punishing their sins, they would long ago have been consumed by his wrath. His faithfulness is seen in that for centuries he had borne with their sins, and withheld his hand in judgment, which would have utterly destroyed them. It is because "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise" (either of mercy or judgment), "as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (Mal. iii, 6; II. Pet. iii, 9.)

III.—AN APPEAL AND A PROMISE.

These people were blind to their sins, as we are to ours, and disposed to charge God with unfaithfulness. He sets them right on this point. "Even from the days of your fathers, ye have gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them." Yet he had not utterly cut them off, and was even now ready to bless them.

1. "Return unto me, and I will return unto you."—This is God's proposition to them. This has always been God's proposition to the backslider. "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." (II. Chron. vii, 14.) "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, . . . and I will heal thy backslidings." (Jer. iii, 12, 13, 22.) So now he says in the same spirit: "Return unto me, and I will return unto you." They answer querulously: "Wherein shall we return?" as though they had done no evil and there was nothing to repent of. How blind we are to our sins! God reminds them of two things: first, that they had robbed him, even the whole nation; and secondly, that the curse of barrenness upon their land, their poverty and their oppression from the surrounding nations, was the direct result of

their sins. "Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." They return with their insolent answer: "Wherein have we robbed thee?" God replied: "In tithes and offerings." They had withheld the tithes and offerings which God had prescribed for the service of the Temple and the maintenance of the priests. The Temple was empty, the storehouses in the Temple were bare. Through covetousness and greed they had withheld their gifts and offerings, both those which were prescribed by law and those which were left to their "free will." Even so have we been selfish, and though we have resorted to the house of God on the Sabbath-days, we have devoted our time to self-seeking, gain, and pleasure. We have left the work and service of God undone. How few our prayers; how little we have attended to the Master's business; how huge the debts remaining on the churches which we have built to gratify our pride; how empty the treasuries of the missionary societies; how few laborers in the field all white for the harvest—and yet how abundant our time, our opportunities, and even our wealth! We are verily more guilty than Israel of old; for while God has blessed us in basket and store, and caused our fields to bring forth plentifully and our business to prosper in our hands, we have consumed it all, or the most of it, on our own selves, and given the Lord only his small portion.

2. An exhortation.—Yet the Lord is merciful. He will not swiftly cut us off, but make a place for our repentance. He challenges us to prove him, and to prove him now, by returning to duty and to service. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (Mal. iii, 10.)

3. Great promises.—Not only will the Lord pour out blessings from on high, but he will "rebuke the devourer," take away the blight from their fields, cause the locusts and other plagues to pass away from the fields and vineyards. These were the curses from which Israel was suffering. We are suffering from all sorts of blights now,—scepticism, contentions, controversies, and strifes within the Church, and poverty of spiritual results from our ministry of the Word. Instead of the record of revivals, the grateful reports of glad and successful missionaries, thronged congregations of happy worshipers, we have columns of contentions, strifes, bitternesses, the wail of pastors over small congregations, and few conversions; the almost despairing appeals from the mission-fields for more workers

to help and more money to carry on the work. God promises that he will change all this if we will but return unto him. Moreover, he will cause the Church of Christ so to shine in beauty and blossom out in prosperity that the outside world shall call her blessed, and "ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the Lord." These were promises, it is true, spoken to Israel of old, but they are promises spoken to us as well. The temporal blessings promised to Israel are but the seeds which contain spiritual blessings to the Church of Christ. Their sins have a counterpart in ours. Their robberies in withholding tithes and offerings are repeated in our lack of consecration, worldliness, and selfishness. Is it not high time that we should cease our complaints against God, and return to a whole-hearted and loving service, and prove his faithfulness and unchangeableness in respect of all his covenant promises?

XXVI.

REVIEW OR OPTIONAL LESSON.

XXVII.

PAUL CALLED TO EUROPE.—Acts xvi, 6-15.

(6) Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, (7) After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. (8) And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. (9) And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. (10) And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. (11) Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; (12) And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. (13) And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. (14) And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. (15) And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.—Acts xvi, 6-15.

After having delivered the decree to the church at Antioch (xv), Silas and Judas, both endowed with the prophetic gift, remained for a while with the church. In the meantime Paul conceived the plan of revisiting all the churches which he and Barnabas had gathered, for the purpose of ascertaining their progress and encouraging them in the new way. The proposition met with the approbation of Barnabas; but Paul, for some reason, objected to the taking of Mark with them. This was an occasion of a hot dispute between these two great friends, and led to their separation. Paul taking Silas, and Barnabas, Mark, they started in different directions, both being recommended to the grace of God by the church. Paul and Silas first went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches. Thence they came to Derbe and Lystra, where Paul found his "beloved son" Timothy, and with this addition to his company continued his visitation work among the churches, in every one of which he also read the important decree of the apostles and elders of the church at Jerusalem which had been sent to Antioch. The result

of the visitation was that "so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily." (v. 5.)

I.—AN UNSEEN COMPANION.

The course of the Apostle and his companions was in general a western one, though we have no data upon which to construct a map of their visitation through Galatia except as far as Derbe and Lystra. It seems to have been their intention to have visited the large cities of Asia Minor; but they were forbidden by the Holy Ghost. (v. 6.) The first question of importance that meets us in this our present study is the one raised by the statement made in the sixth and repeated in the seventh verses; namely, that they "were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia," and were not "suffered by the Spirit to go into Bithynia." When Jesus gave the great commission to his disciples, he said to them: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Now of course this must have been a promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The revised version translates the seventh verse thus: "The Spirit of Jesus suffered them not." This undoubtedly is the correct rendering. Taken together, we see the identification of the Spirit of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of Jesus, is the most precious gift of Christ to the Church. What strikes us in reading the story of the early labors of the apostles is that that presence was so real and familiar. They knew the Holy Ghost, not as a doctrine, but as a person present with them. They consulted him and were instructed, guided, led, and directed by him, as though the Master himself had been present with them. Though not visibly present, he was actually present. The expression, "It seemed good unto us and to the Holy Ghost," takes us into a council-chamber where the Holy Ghost is present as any other person might be, and whose voice was made known and taken into chief account. This Holy Spirit was the companion of Paul and Silas on that journey. We do not know how the Holy Spirit made known to these apostles his will in the matter of the route they should take, but it is certain that the communication was definite and particularly understood. First, they were forbidden to go into the large cities of Asia Minor, and then they were not suffered to go into the regions of Bithynia. I was once present in a company of Christians where a lady, who seemed to have much fellowship with the Spirit of Jesus, was asked how she knew "the voice of the Spirit." Her answer was by another question: "How do you know your hus-

band's step or your child's cry from the step and the cry of all others? I cannot tell you how I know the voice of the Spirit, but it is as real to me as the voice of any other person I know." We are directed so often to "walk in the Spirit," to "live in the Spirit," to "be led by the Spirit," that it certainly is implied that there must be both a personal knowledge and a power of recognition of the Spirit. If we know the Spirit and are living in communion with him, we shall be able to discern his voice and be guided by his direction. How simple life would be if we had such fellowship with the Spirit that, when we were going wrong, or directing our feet in right paths though at wrong times, the Spirit would just interpose and say to us, "No, not that way; not that course; such is not wise or the will of God for you at this time." The impression one gets from this narrative is that these men were allowed to choose their own course and determine their own routes and places of labor until they crossed the manifest will of God in some way; then the Spirit interposed definitely and gave them specific direction. This, I fancy, is the true course of Christian life. Live and act naturally on the lines that your own wishes and Christian judgment suggest. If at any time your judgment is in error, or God has a special course for you to pursue, the Spirit will speak, so that there need be no mistake. But if any one will be thus guided by the Spirit he must be obedient and mind the Spirit, ready to give up any cherished plan and change the whole course of action in obedience to the heavenly word. May it not be that our unwillingness to go God's way accounts to a large degree for our loss of the Spirit's admonition and guidance? Good judgment and "sanctified common sense" are most invaluable possessions; but no natural gifts, however much improved, cultivated, and sanctified, can possibly take the place of the Holy Spirit.

1. Two closed doors.—The Apostle, according to the natural bent of his mind and habit, thus far had evidently intended to visit some of the larger cities of Asia, and so determined. Suddenly he found the door to these cities shut in his face, if not rudely, at least effectually. "He was forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia." Then he turned to upper Asia (Minor), or Bithynia, and proposed entering that field; but he found this door closed also, for "the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not" to enter there. Why God interposed to prevent the apostolic missionaries from entering these fields we, of course, do not know. It certainly was not because he did not wish Asia and Bithynia to have the Word. It was simply, we must suppose, that the "time and the season" were not propitious then. There is a time and a season for all things, for

the Gospel to be preached in certain countries, and to individuals. Happy the country, happy the man or woman, who, when the time comes for them to hear the word of God, are prompt to respond to it. There was some divine, all-wise reason for postponing the further work in Asia and beginning the work in Europe, as we shall presently see.

2. A call for help.—While in the dilemma of waiting to find out what to do and where to go they had come as far as Troas, which, by consulting the map, you will see is on the northwestern coast of the Ægean Sea. We have not time to linger over this famous city, presuming most of our readers know well its history. While tarrying here “a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” Here, then, was the reason why they were not allowed to go into Asia or Bithynia. God’s purpose was that the Gospel should now enter Europe by way of Macedonia. It is useless to speculate on the nature of this vision. It was not a dream, though it was in the night-time. It was probably not an actual presence (like the angel’s before Peter on the housetop), but an appearance which took the shape and dress of a “man from Macedonia.” Paul was probably familiar with the appearance, the dress, and speech of these people, from having seen or met them in his own important commercial city. At any rate, there was the vision, the voice, and the call for help. It was God-sent, and was not to be gainsaid. Why the Holy Spirit did not directly intimate the will of God concerning Europe, as he had done concerning Asia, we do not know. God does not work in stereotyped lines. The spiritual world is as full of variety as is the natural world. By the Spirit, by an angel, by a vision, by a dream, God communicates with his people if he has special need, as in these early times—in the beginning of things—he did. When William Carey sat cobbling boots and studying the map of the world, he had a vision of heathen millions standing before him and saying, “Come over and help us.” So if we have our heart toward the Lord, and our eyes toward the world of sinners for whom Christ died, we shall not lack for visions of men calling us over to help them. A traveler once passed by a wretched man sitting by the wayside, with emaciated face and limbs, with a few rags gathered about him, forlorn, sick, and starving. Turning, he asked the poor creature why he did not solicit an alms. “Sir,” said the poor man, “if the misery your own eyes can see has not solicited your charity, no words of mine could avail to move your heart.” So it is all about us. We need not special visions or dream voices.

Every drunkard, every young man running down the course of this world, all the poverty, sin, and crime in the world, and exposed to our eyes at every turn, every unconverted child in our households, are men from Macedonia saying, "Come over and help us." It will be noticed that it was not the actual Macedonians, nor an actual representative of the Macedonians, who stood before Paul, but only a vision. So the needy people in the world do not themselves present themselves before us or send delegations, but God casts a shadow of their need, a vision of their ignorance, sin, and weakness before our mind's eye, and himself calls us to special fields of work. It is not lack of visions, but lack of obedience to visions, from which we suffer. Let every Christian look about him, and he will see a vision and hear a voice saying, "Come over and help us."

3. An open door.—The Spirit had closed two doors in the faces of this missionary company, but now he had opened another, wide and effectual, before them. When God shuts one door we may be sure that he will presently open another. We might almost find our way through the world by taking note of the open and shut doors on our path, not pushing at closed doors, and not hesitating to enter in at open ones. The leadings of the Spirit are not intended to take away from us the privilege and responsibility of deliberation and judgment. Taking all things together—the prohibitions of the Spirit and the appearance of this vision, the fact of which Paul seems to have laid before his companions—they discussed the whole matter, and "gathered assuredly" that the Lord had called them to preach the Gospel to the Macedonians. God's voices and visions need to be pondered and carefully interpreted. The walk of the Spirit is not a mechanical one. The Spirit hints and intimates: it is for us to listen and carefully to consider. By training we learn. An experienced doctor can detect the presence of disease by the feel of the pulse or the beat of the heart when a layman would know nothing, either right or wrong. So the Christian who is trained in the ways of the Spirit may always "gather assuredly" what the mind of the Spirit is. Paul was a spiritually-minded man, and probably had some faint conception of the ultimate mission of the Gospel; yet it had never as yet entered into his head or heart to visit Europe. To him Asia was the whole world. But now he saw the circumference of God's plan widening, and I have no doubt he heard this call to preach the Gospel to the Macedonians with great joy. There are some people who tell us that we had better evangelize our own country before turning our attention to foreign lands. Here is an answer to this position. God himself shut up the doors at home in

order that these missionaries might go abroad. For the time being the home field was passed over in order that the Gospel might be preached abroad. Great unevangelized districts in Asia and Bithynia were also passed over in order that a beginning might be made in Europe.

4. A straight course.—They lost no time after the word came to them. “Immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia.” Paul was a man who “immediately” obeyed “heavenly visions.” As soon as he knew the will of God he set about doing it. He did not postpone his obedience to more convenient seasons, but immediately laid his hand to the work. Having found a vessel which would take them to Neapolis, the seaport of Philippi, they sailed by a “straight course” to that city, passing on the way the island of Samothracia. The “straight course” here is a nautical term, but it may be used in a higher sense also. There are those who seem always to take a tortuous course; but Paul was a man not only of quick decision and immediate action, but whenever he could he sailed a “straight course” to his destined harbor. He went at his work with a will, and straight at it. Whilst he had infinite tact, he used it always to lead him in the most direct line to his goal. The longest way round is sometimes the shortest way home, but it is not usually so; and life may be increased a good half, and a man’s power multiplied, by taking “straight courses” whenever it is possible.

5. At Philippi.—Philippi was “the chief city” in that part of Macedonia, and a Roman colony. That is, it was one of those specially favored settlements which was considered to be, though removed by hundreds of miles, a part of the city of Rome. In its government and privileges it was a miniature Rome. It was the first city or gateway into Europe through which the Gospel found its way into the Western world. It was in this neighborhood that the great battle between the imperialists and the republicans of Rome was fought, which turned Rome from a republic into an empire. Here a mightier battle was fought, which, though it made no such stir in the political world, yet changed the whole moral condition and spiritual destiny of Europe. Arriving at Philippi, they seemed quietly to abide for a few days, no doubt looking about them, and taking their bearings, in order to determine how best to begin their work. Here we find the illustration of another wise proverb, which bids us to “make haste slowly.” The incident which follows was, no doubt, in part, a result of these quiet days of inquiry and observation.

II.—THE FIRST EUROPEAN CONVERT.

Lydia was not, strictly speaking, an European, but belonged to an Asiatic, province, Thyatira. Yet for purposes of trade she was in Europe, and thus became the first convert on European soil, just as Cornelius was the first European convert on Asiatic soil. These two cases of Lydia and Cornelius were, as it were, the two spans of the bridge that united Asia and Europe by the Gospel.

1. A Sabbath-day.—We do not know how many days Paul and his companions had been in Philippi; but we must believe that it was on the very first Sabbath of their sojourn that they went forth to the river-side, where certain people, of whom they had heard, were in the habit of resorting for prayer. It was not Paul's custom to keep at home on the Sabbath, behind closed doors and windows, reading solemn books, and "being religious." To him the Sabbath was a day of "rest in labor." It was his "custom" to go abroad on the Sabbath-days in search of souls. What a blessed break this day of rest is from the secularities of the world. It is God's day, the day of the Lord, the day when his people, freed from the toil and drudgery of secular pursuits, are at liberty to go abroad, to places where people assemble by the river-side and elsewhere for prayer, and to "fish for souls." Thus did Paul use his Sabbath-days; thus did the Master himself go abroad on the Sabbath to heal those who had need of him.

2. The river-side.—There was no synagogue in Philippi, it being a military rather than a commercial city, which is sufficient to account for the absence of any great number of Jews. Yet there were a few Jews there and some proselytes. They resorted to a river-side for worship and prayer, and for religious bathing. In all Oriental countries the river-side is a sacred place. It was on the willows on the banks of the river of Babylon that the Jews hung their harps and sorrowed in the days of captivity. Here in India every river-side has its gathering of people to pray and bathe; especially is this true of the Ganges, Jumna, and Hooghly. Paul had found out this place, and naturally went there to seek out first those who knew the God of the Old Testament, whether Jews or proselytes.

3. In the way of salvation.—Lydia and her household were not Christians, perhaps not saved at all in the New Testament sense, but they were in the way of salvation. They were devout, and worshiped God according to their light. Like Nathanael under the

fig tree, like Cornelius in Cesarea, praying and giving alms, like the Eunuch reading his parchment copy of Isaiah, these women, and especially Lydia, were in the way of salvation. God always meets with such. Nathanael had his Philip, Cornelius had his Peter, the Eunuch had his Philip (the deacon), and Lydia had her Paul. God knows those who are seeking him, and sends them the right teachers.

4. Apostolic preaching.—Art has pictured Paul to us in flowing robes, with outstretched hand speaking to the philosophers gathered upon Mars' Hill in Athens. No doubt it was a grand sight to thus see Paul the orator discussing the great questions of life and death with these Athenians; but here we see the same apostle in another manner. A few women gathered by a river-side to pray and bathe: Paul comes among them and sits down, and there tells them of Jesus and the resurrection. His Master before him had gladly discoursed with one woman at the Jacob's-well curb. It was meet that he should walk in the footsteps of his Lord. No doubt it is pleasanter and more inspiriting to preach on Mars' Hill than to sit down and talk with the handful of women we may meet here and there; but as the woman of Samaria carried the news of salvation to her city, who knows but that this woman carried back the news of salvation to her own city, and was the means of gathering one of the famous seven churches of Asia? If we would be apostolic, let us sow our seed by all waters, carry on God's work under all circumstances, be ready to serve among the few as well as among the many, counting it all joy to be used anywhere and for the salvation of any soul.

5. "A certain woman."—There were a company of women who resorted to that river-side, but among them there was "a certain woman." It is these "certain" individual women which have marked the history of the Church, and studded it as with gems all along the line from Sarah to Lydia. We hear men sneer at the power of the Gospel because it is "so attractive to women." "Religion is good enough for women," these fools say, as though they were too good or too wise for religion. It is well for men that women have accepted Christ, and by imbibing his sweet and gentle spirit have made the world tolerable for men to live in. What would the world have ever done if it had not been for those "certain women" who have blessed it—the Sarahs, the Rebeccas, the Hannahs, the Nomis, the Ruths, the Elizabeths, the Maries, the Dorecases, the Priscillas, and scores of others whose names are written both in the Bible, in Church history, and in the unread records of a million homes and private places in the world. God be praised that the

women in general, and our own wives and daughters in particular, have attended to the words which have been spoken to them from the Lord, and become his disciples. It is a day of woe when women become irreligious. The world can scarce live with its infidel men; alas, it would die did the women turn also to infidelity!

6. The preparation of the heart is from the Lord.—This woman of Thyatira, this seller of purple, was a devout worshiper of God. If all trading men and women were worshipers of God, business would be better in more ways than one. God watches over his worshipers, and now he brought new teaching, better news than she had ever heard, to her. The Spirit was present and unlocked her heart, drew away the Jewish prejudices which clung about it, and gave her both heart and ear to attend to and receive the word of salvation. It is not said she was converted, but it is sure that conversion is the result of an open heart and an honest attention to God's word. Let not any one suppose that conversion is a haphazard matter. Look at all the steps which, directed of the Lord, led up to the conversion of this woman, and then judge whether conversion is a mere accident of time and circumstance.

7. Given to hospitality.—Immediately upon her conversion she was baptized, and with her, we are told, "her household." It is not at all certain that this expression includes infants. It is more likely that it refers to her retainers and servants. Being a trading merchant, and traveling as well, it is hardly likely that she had infant children with her. It is not a point of importance. This is one, however, that so soon as she was formally introduced into the kingdom of God, her heart went out in hospitable intent toward the servants of God by whose ministry she had been brought to the knowledge of the truth. "Given to hospitality," is an injunction that belongs to Christian teaching; and of old, having entertained the saints, was itself a mark of sainthood. Paul at first was disinclined to accept her hospitality, according to his invariable rule of not being burdensome to any. But she constrained them, and he yielded. True courtesy yields a point to hospitality, even when inclination and habit lead to an opposite course. This was but the beginning of Lydia's hospitality and ministry to the servants of God. We shall see further as we study her story. (v. 40.)

XXVIII.

PAUL AT PHILIPPI.—Acts xvi, 19-34.

(19) And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, (20) And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, (21) And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. (22) And the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. (23) And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely: (24) Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. (25) And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. (26) And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. (27) And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. (28) But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. (29) Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, (30) And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? (31) And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. (32) And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. (33) And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. (34) And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.—Acts xvi, 19-34.

Paul and his party reached Philippi as it were in a calm sea. For a few days all remained quiet and prosperous. The first few days of rest and quiet observation, followed by the Sabbath at the river-side and the conversion of Lydia and her household, gave token of a prosperous time. Then followed the incident—a street incident—of the poor devil-possessed girl, who was made merchandise of by her cruel masters, and out of whom Paul cast the devil. (vs. 16-18.) This was the signal for the battle with the hosts of darkness. Not long were these men to have a peaceful time. In fact, the days of their peace were at an end. They were accustomed to this kind of usage, however. No fair-weather Christians, no dress-parade soldiers were they. The grace of God cannot work long without coming into conflict with the powers of darkness; the Gospel of

Christ does not run far without meeting with and stirring up the devil. So Paul and his party found it, both to their cost and to their joy.

I.—APOSTOLIC TRIAL.

We have remarked that Paul was already acquainted with rough handling by a mob; but now, for the first time, he really came into conflict with a *heathen* mob pure and simple. Hitherto his persecutors had been Jews; now they were heathen, and of the very worst class, instigated by men who were heartless enough to make gain out of the heavy and wretched misfortune of the poor girl who was possessed of the "Python devil." So long as these men had not interfered with their gains or evil practices they remained unnoticed in the city; but the moment the Gospel interfered with their ill-gotten gains, then these lewd and heartless men, together with their dupes, began to create an uproar.

1. The authors of the mischief.—These were the masters or owners of the poor lunatic girl, out of whom they made much money by deceiving the ignorant, and trading on the superstitious fears of the masses, who are always ready to be duped. I have witnessed here in India the very things which these men practiced with the insane girl. A lunatic child is considered by its parents a very God-send, because out of the mental infirmity gain may be had, either by directly utilizing the child themselves, or selling it to some master who knows better how to manipulate the misfortune. Even blindness and deformity are thus utilized by parents to make gain of their children. In many cases men deliberately feign madness in order to gain money from the people by prophesying or amusing the people with crazy antics. This was a case of real madness, induced by the actual presence of the "Python spirit." The conversion of this young woman and the exorcism of the evil spirit at once put an end to all hope of their gain. No wonder they were enraged at these preachers of the Gospel. For the same reason rum-sellers, book-makers, and those who otherwise traffic in the misfortunes and sins of others, are filled with indignation at the disturbances of the peace (?) which the Gospel creates. The hope of such gain is curtailed, no doubt, by the presence of the Gospel. For the Gospel limits the field and the methods of business to the conditions and laws of righteousness. The Gospel will not tolerate gain in connection with slavery, drink traffic, gambling, and other businesses, which are very profitable because they feed upon the passions and weaknesses of men. It was these men who instigated the persecution of the apostles.

2. A false charge.—It is bad enough to be arrested and punished for our faults, and to be condemned for things of which we have been actually guilty; but here a part of the suffering was that they were falsely accused. Nevertheless, it is better to suffer innocently than to go free as a wrong-doer. These men, when they seized the apostles and dragged them before the magistrates, charged them with being disturbers of the peace of the city. What a lot of liars they were! They, and not the apostles, were breaking the peace. However, it was their cue (as it was the wolf's against the lamb) to charge them with muddying the stream. They carefully keep out of sight their real motives, and say not a word of the real cause of their anger, namely, that they had suffered in their pockets by the conversion and healing of the mad slave girl. Their charges were ingeniously contrived. They "trouble our city." Here they pose as pure-minded citizens who have no interest so close at heart as the welfare of the city. Then these men are "Jews." This was a good stroke of policy, for the Jews were in general bad odor, and just then especially; because of some recent uproar in Rome they had recently been banished from that city, and Philippi could not do better than imitate her regal patron. Then with great tact they charge the apostles with teaching customs which were "not lawful" for them to receive, being Romans. In this there was a grain of truth: for though Rome was tolerant of all religions, even that of the Jews, she was intolerant of any kind of proselytizing from one religion to another, which, especially among the heathen, tended to strife and confusion. In this the policy of Rome was wise. But it could not be otherwise than that the Gospel should violate both in spirit and letter this law of Rome. To preach the truth of the one God and Jesus Christ was directly and indirectly to attack and antagonize all forms of idolatry and heathenism. As a matter of fact, though the accusers of the apostles were not concerned on that point at that time, the casting out of that Python devil from that poor maid was the first blow to European heathenism. It was the first skirmish in the grand conflict, and the one that brought on the battle which did not end until the last idol in Europe was cast down and the last form of heathenism was routed. Wherever the Gospel comes it must stir up the hatred of evil men and lay the ax at the root of the tree of human pride—"our custom."

3. A cruel beating.—Not waiting for formal trial, but taking the word of their accusers, and hearkening to the howling mob which had been raised by these clever men who had lost the "hope of gain," and to whom the ignorant populace had been in the habit of

giving heed, the magistrates ordered Paul and Silas to be beaten with rods. This is one of the most cruel tortures to which the wretched victims of Roman law (or violence) were subject. With backs laid bare, the flexible rods were laid on mercilessly, until the whole was a mass of broken and lacerated flesh, bruised and broken until every inch of the body was as sensitive as an unlanced boil. Paul speaks of this experience (I. Thess. ii, 2) as "shameful treatment received at Philippi." No doubt he remembered it all the days of his life, and carried with him in his own body these honorable marks of his suffering for Christ's sake. For Christ's sake he was glad thus to "endure hardness," but that did not by any means excuse or justify the "shameful treatment" received at the hands of the Philippians, though no doubt in after-years Paul's joy over the brethren in that city, the thoughts of his beloved Philippians, quite put out of mind the suffering he had gone through in bringing the Gospel to them.

4. Cast into prison.—The rage against these apostles was great; "many stripes" were given them, more than usual. Then they were cast into prison, another Eastern horror, and one that we are little acquainted with; a horrible dungeon, foul with putrid air and uncleaned filth, black with unnatural darkness, and damp with undried walls. The inner prison, I suppose, was one more horrible than another, deeper down or farther in; the prison reserved for the worst criminals, or for those who were never more to come out, or only to come out to execution. Added to these things, the jailer, in order to be zealous in carrying out the spirit of his superiors, added the stocks—bitter, hard, and cruel irons, in which the feet were placed; perhaps, as was usual, their wrists also, and even their necks. When, later on in his experiences, Paul said "bonds and afflictions abide me," he knew what he was talking about, and had fully counted the cost when he accepted this alternative.

II.—APOSTOLIC FAITH.

None of these things moved these early heroes. It was indeed a strange sequel to the prompt obedience they had rendered to the directions of the Spirit to come into Europe, and to preach the Gospel there. Had they been walking by sight they must have "gathered assuredly" that they had made a great mistake. But not so these men. Faith sees in the dark, and discerns the hand of God in bonds and imprisonments, as well as in the loud acclaims of the eager multitude.

1. **A midnight service.**—Luke and Timothy seem somehow to have escaped the fury of the mob, and Paul and Silas only were its victims. What a strange place for a prayer-meeting! What a strange hour for a song! What strange circumstances to evoke them! Here is the triumph of faith, a triumph superior to all circumstances, and which translates even those which surrounded them in the light of God. With such faith even these sorely suffering men could not only pray but sing. Prayer does not mean despair, but may mean confidence, and in this case it doubtless did. The memory of more than one Psalm must have furnished the argument for their prayer and the theme for their hymn. “Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High: and call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” “Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him.” “In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for a house of defense to save me. For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name’s sake lead me, and guide me. Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength. Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.” (Ps. 1, 14, 15; xci, 14, 15; xxxi, 1–5.) Perhaps these were the words. At any rate, these Psalms furnished the spirit of their hymn and the argument of their prayer. It was a singular service, a strange place for a prayer-meeting; but prisons can be palaces when the Lord is present with his people.

2. **A listening audience.**—The other prisoners in ward had perhaps seen them as they were passed by to their inner dungeon, and gathered something of who they were. At midnight they were awakened by the unwonted sounds of their voices lifted in prayer and song. This was new to them. What manner of men are these who are waking the echoes of this old prison with such joyful sounds? Oaths, imprecations, and ribald songs would not have disturbed their slumbers, but such “songs of praise” they had never heard. They were not singing to an audience, and yet they had one, those sorely beaten apostles. And so will we have those “listening to us” that we wot not of, if in every place and in all things we acknowledge the Lord. A happy hymn from the lips of a consistent Christian has great attractions even to the ungodly.

3. **A loud Amen.**—As they prayed and sang there came a sudden earthquake, which shook the prison to its foundations, flung open all its doors, and threw down the stocks which held the prisoners bound. This was God's answer to prayer, his *Amen* to their faith. The earthquake may not have been the result of miracle, any more than the concurrence of the wicked hands of the Jews in crucifying Christ was a miracle, though it served the purpose of God at that time. So it was here. Let us accept it either as natural or supernatural, or, if we please, as both; for, indeed, there is little or no difference between the natural and the supernatural, except in the regularity and frequency of the one and the infrequency of the other. God is as much present in the law that brings about the daily natural events as he is in the law that brings about the occasional supernatural events. In this earthquake and its results we have a kind of prophecy of what God's answer will be to all the devices of men and all the forces of death and hell arrayed together against his Son Jesus Christ and the Gospel of his love. He will, indeed, open the prison doors and let his captives go free, and the devil's captives too; he will overthrow and bring to naught the devices and schemes of men, and send his Gospel forth with increased power from the very place where men sought to imprison and bury it; he will one day rend the earth by the voice of the archangel, and the very grave (that prison-house of ten times ten thousands of his saints) shall open its long-closed doors, and "the prisoners of hope" shall go free into eternal glory, changed and fashioned into the image of Jesus Christ.

III.—APOSTOLIC TRIUMPH.

How this earthquake, God's Amen to the prayer and hymn of Paul and Silas, changed things around! The praying and singing did not awaken the jailer, but the earthquake did. Nothing short of an earthquake will awaken some men to a sense of their sin and the immanence of God. At any rate, when the jailer sprung from his couch and saw that the prison was practically in ruins, all the doors open and the prisoners loosed, he was overwhelmed first with a fear of the consequences to himself of allowing his prisoners to escape. His first impulse was to commit suicide, the resort of many a brave Roman at that day to escape disgrace. But in this purpose he was arrested by the voice of Paul.

1. "**Do thyself no harm.**"—There is nothing vindictive in the spirit of Christ. That jailer had gloated over the sufferings of Paul

the night before, and so far as we know had added the stocks to their sufferings of his own free will. Now their circumstances are changed. Paul is the master of the situation, and the jailer is, as it were, at his mercy. But Paul wished him no harm, and hastened to assure him that not only was he there all safe and sound, a prisoner of his own will, but for some reason even the other prisoners were restrained from escaping.

2. **“What shall I do to be saved?”**—Upon hearing this astonishing bit of news, the jailer was still more amazed. He had strange prisoners. They sang at midnight and their God shook open their prison doors, and yet they voluntarily remained in prison. This stolid old soldier was thoroughly aroused and shaken up. Calling for a light, he sprung into Paul’s prison, trembling with fear and conviction, and, falling down at the feet of the apostles, cried out: “Sirs, what shall I do to be saved?” There is no doubt as to the nature of this cry of the jailer’s. He would have killed himself through fear of the higher state authorities, but now through fear of God he would be saved. No man knows the value of his life until he sees it in the light of the judgment. How the jailer came to know about salvation must be to a certain extent a matter of conjecture; but it is not unlikely that he had heard of the new doctrines which Paul and Silas were preaching in connection with their arrest and imprisonment. No matter: he knew himself a sinner, and wanted salvation. He cried out for instruction, and sought the light of God from the servants of God. It is true that his cry was one of fear; but fear is a right motive in coming to God. Any man truly convicted of sin must be filled with fear at its consequences. It is well that men should be made afraid of sin, death, and the judgment. Would that more were so! If there were more fear of the consequences of sin there would be less loose indulgence of sin.

3. **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.”**—This is the simple answer to this all-important question. We are sure that Paul said more than this to him; but we are also sure that all else that he said was but in elucidation of this great truth. The apostate Julian said to a Christian as a sneer: “Faith! this is your whole philosophy.” “Well,” says some wise man, commenting on this, “only let us stick to our philosophy and we will do well.” To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to believe him to be the Son of God and the Saviour of sinners, and to accept him as such and surrender one’s self to God by him. This is to be saved. The way of salvation was open not only to the jailer, but to all his house, to whom also Paul spoke the words of the Lord, as well as to their chief.

4. Two washings.—When Paul and Silas went into that prison with their backs bleeding and torn, there was no compassion in the heart of the jailer. His only ministry was the fixing of the stocks upon their feet. How different the heart is after God comes into it. Now those poor swollen stripes, which perhaps the night before provoked some brutal jest, lie like wales of fire upon his own heart. With tender hands that rough old jailer now leads them out to the fountain in the prison court, and there tenderly bathes away the burning pain, washing off the clotted blood, and doubtless soothing the wounds with oil and soft bandages. In return the apostles administer a washing to the jailer and his household. They (Acts xxii, 16; I. Pet. iii, 21) baptized him and all his straightway. In those primitive times faith was a simple matter. It was just believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, taking God at his word. And obedience was as prompt as it was simple. The same hour of the night in which the jailer believed he was baptized. There was no question as to whether he would hold out. That was taken for granted, if he believed on the Lord. So here in the prison-yard another lot of converts was gathered, out of which the Philippian Church was afterward formed.

5. A marriage supper.—After the jailer had washed the stripes upon the backs of Paul and Silas, and Silas had baptized the jailer and his household, the jailer in turn took matters in hand, and brought the two servants of God back into his house, setting meat before them. It seems that hospitality was a cardinal point with these early disciples. At any rate this jailer celebrated the marriage of his household to Christ with a feast, in which believing and rejoicing was not a small part of the good things of which all partook.

XXIX.

PAUL AT ATHENS.—Acts xvii, 22–31.

(22) Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. (23) For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. (24) God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; (25) Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; (26) And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; (27) That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: (28) For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. (29) Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. (30) And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: (31) Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.—Acts xvii, 22–31.

We have now entered upon the third stage of this second missionary journey of Paul. The first was through Asia from Antioch to Troas; the second through Macedonia, including Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea; the third is now beginning at Athens and will end in Corinth, the two cities which correspond with Achaia. We will not take space to follow Paul through Thessalonica, where he stayed three weeks, and gathered one of the most remarkable churches in Europe, where he was bitterly and ruthlessly persecuted and driven forth by the Jews; nor through Berea, where the people distinguished themselves by an honest search of the Scriptures to see if the things which Paul preached were true. After this Paul came alone to Athens, having sent Timotheus back to Thessalonica, his other companions remaining behind at Berea. Entering the splendid city of Athens, Paul's noble soul was stirred at its magnificent architectural beauty, but more at its utter abandonment to idolatry. Every street, every corner, every open space, every public building, was crowded with idols. It has been said that you could

not find a man in Athens because of the multitudes of gods. Not only were all the forces of nature deified and embodied in idols, but even every passion of the human soul was deified and worshiped—love, hatred, envy, honor, pride, etc. I have recently visited a city in Burmah, Pagan, the most sacred city of the Buddhists, albeit it is now an abandoned city. It is literally a City of Pagodas; for five miles square the whole ground is covered with pagodas—these idol temples of Buddha. In the city of Mandalay in upper Burmah there is one vast inclosure, in which are gathered round one huge central pagoda four hundred and fifty others; on every street and in every quarter these pagodas (which are but idol shrines) are to be seen; there are hundreds of them in the city; along the Irrawaddy River, down which I came, for more than seven hundred miles the eye never missed a pagoda; on every hill-top, on every projecting point of rock, on every plain, there the idol shrine lifted its head, and often before the private house there also was a shrine. On entering one of the great river shrines, the eye is greeted with two rows of vast hereulean Buddhas crowded close together, forty-nine on each side. Thus a religion which was inaugurated as a protest against idolatry has become the most idolatrous of them all. In Athens the craze after gods had become so great that the whole city was filled with idols. Everything was deified, and every available space seized upon as a site for an idol. Then when they could imagine nothing else which might be deified, they erected altars and inscribed them “to The Unknown God,” determined that in any event they would allow no god to escape their worship. This utter abandonment of Athens to paganism stirred Paul’s heart with pitiful indignation. But it did more: it stirred him to action; so that we find him in the synagogues preaching the Gospel to the Jews, and in the market-place or “agora,” discussing the question of religion with the philosophers, and with any other body who would listen to him. In this way he had attracted the attention of some of the Epicureans and Stoics, who desired to hear more particularly concerning the doctrines he preached, as it was a passion with the Athenians to hear and report something new. Paul had hitherto encountered the prejudices of the bigoted Jews, the sordid passions of the commoner heathen of Philippi and that part of Europe; he now for the first time comes into contact with the polished and cultured philosophy of Greece. He was courteously invited to go with these men to the Acropolis, or at least to Mars’ Hill, where such discussions were wont to be held, and there expound his doctrines. The invitation was courteous, but only partly serious. It would at least serve them for

a new diversion, for they had heard that he was a setter forth of strange or foreign doctrines, and this whetted their appetite. At any rate, Paul found himself on this famous spot with a congregation of cultured men about him, and he was neither slow nor afraid to bring before them the great truth he was commissioned to preach to all the world.

I.—THE UNKNOWN GOD.

Standing in the midst of his audience, Paul began his speech in a most conciliatory and adroit way. Anxious to say anything kind he could of them, he at the same time fully purposed faithfully to lay bare the folly and sin of their gross idolatry.

1. A devout people.—The innate wisdom of the Apostle is seen in the courteous manner in which he opened his address: “I perceive that in all things ye are *very devout*.” (This is the true reading of the passage.) That they were “too superstitious” was undoubtedly true, but this is not what Paul wished or intended to convey. He was anxious to gain some point at which he might commend them and thus win their good-will, in order that he might speak the more plainly to them later on concerning things which he could not commend. If possible, we ought always to find out any point of unity between ourselves and our audiences, or those with whom we speak concerning the things of God. Courtesy and tact were two of Paul’s most efficient weapons in spiritual warfare. He never lost an opportunity of saying a courteous word, or failed to lay hold on any favoring circumstance in the case which might be before him. So it was here. These people were indeed devout. Religion entered into every part of their life. Gods were erected over their courts of justice, over their places of trade, over their schools, plentifully placed on their streets, and enshrined in all their houses. Eating, drinking, teaching, hearing, walking, talking—in fact, every act of life was presided over by some deity. Every passion and even fancy of the mind had its corresponding deity. This is exactly the case also with the Hindoos among whom I have for the past year and a half been working. There are in the Hindoo Pantheon 333,000,000 gods, there being this vast number so that by no possible means they should miss of bringing their whole life under the power and protection of some deity. When they visit the temple of their particular god, Vishnu, or Mahadeva, they will first offer their rice or oblation of flowers, and then turn to every point of the compass and scatter rice and flowers. This is for all the other gods.

2. An unknown God.—Amongst the objects of their devotions

Paul had observed an altar dedicated TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. This he took for his text. This fact in the first place proved his first point, that they were very devout. Such an altar erected and inscribed suggested three things to Paul's mind. First, that there was in these idolaters a deep sense of need; second, a sense of dependence—therefore they turned from themselves to their fancied gods; third, ignorance. After inventing a god for every fancied need, they were still unsatisfied, and sought out any possible but unknown god that they might worship him, as if by so doing they might fill up the measure of their devotion. But they worshiped him in ignorance. The worship of the unknown god was the cry of darkened hearts to the darkness. Not in Athens alone is this condition of things existent. There are hundreds of thousands of souls all around us yet crowded with "lords many and gods many" dedicated to pleasure, profit, and ambition, and still there is a secret sense of need and a blind feeling after God, who is unknown to them personally, though instinctively believed to be somewhere in the universe.

II.—THE TRUE GOD.

Paul availed himself of this altar with its suggestive inscription to present to these Athenians the true God. "Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." The Athenians, like the Hindoos, divorced their religion from their philosophy. With these multitudinous gods they yet philosophically offered worship to no god. The Epicureans held a materialistic theory of the universe, much as do the agnostics of our day. They divorced God from the universe, or else confounded him with it to such an extent as to destroy all personality, and followed pleasure as the supreme good. The Stoics acknowledged the existence of God, but fell back upon their own sufficiency, refusing dependence upon him, and believed that both creature and Creator were alike the sport and victims of a supreme and omnipotent chance or fate; and yet both parties or schools encouraged the superstitious idolatry which reigned around them. Paul, taking occasion of his audience and the idolatrous habits of the people, opened up to them the true doctrine of God and man in an address which is a masterpiece of argument, and in a spirit which is a pattern for all preachers to imitate. He does not denounce or repudiate either natural religion or philosophy, but seeks to guide both into the line of light which streams from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His discourse, as we have the notes of it, is orderly and logical.

1. The unity of the Godhead.—"God, that made the world and all things therein, is Lord of heaven and earth." He was in a city whose worshippers were both pantheists and polytheists. He at once sets them right on these points. "The unknown god" whom they were ignorantly worshipping answered for Paul's purpose of declaring the truth concerning the true God. (i) He is the Creator of heaven and earth. He is not himself the outcome of creation, but the originator of it. The world is not the outcome of atoms and fortuitous forces, but the effect of an intelligent Creator's will. (ii) He is not a being confounded with nature and lost in it, as the pantheists teach. The wind is not God; the earth, nor the air, nor the water, nor the thunder, nor the lightning, is not God. These are elements and forces in the heavens and earth over which God reigns, and by means of which he rules in creation. He is Lord of heaven and earth. This is the first verse of Genesis over again. (iii) Seeing God is the Creator and Ruler of heaven and earth, it is preposterous to suppose that he could dwell in temples made with human hands. It is true that in the olden time God did vouchsafe to manifest his presence by the Shekinah in the tabernacle, and later in the Temple which Solomon built for his glory; but this was never intended to be understood as a proper dwelling-place for God, as though he were thus limited or confined, or ever could be, to these human boundaries. Stephen pressed this same truth home upon the Jews, who were inclined to fall into the same error. It is true that "Solomon built him a house. Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?" (Acts vii, 47-50.) Jesus uttered the same truth to the Samaritan woman when he said: "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John iv, 21, 24.) It is equally absurd to suppose that the Creator of heaven and earth and the Author of mankind could be ministered to by our hands, as though, instead of giving life and breath and all things to man, he were dependent upon our gifts and ministry. I suppose this was in allusion to the practice current at Athens (as it is here in India) of bringing gifts of food to the gods, as though they were hungry and needed it. To such an extent is this form of worship carried here in India, that every god has a miniature representative, who is regularly dressed in the morning and undressed and put to bed at night,

and is fed with rice at stated times. I have seen the rice lying inches deep about the base of the pedestal upon which some favorite idol rests, flung there in handfuls by the passing worshipers. I once asked a priest why his god did not eat the food that was so lavishly offered to him. He replied for substance that it was the business of the worshipers to offer the food, and it was the concern of the god to eat it or not as he liked. At any rate, if the god would not eat it the priests would, so that it came to the same thing in the end. This form of worship is not quite unknown in Christian lands. Many worshipers fling, if not food, at least prayers and hymns and pence and dimes at their unknown God, supposing that God can be propitiated by their alms and patronage. God is a Spirit, and must be worshiped in spirit and in truth. When shall we learn this great truth?

2. The unity of the human race.—One of the common errors of the heathen growing out of their polytheism was that the human family was not one but many, the different branches of which sprung from different progenitors or gods. The Greeks would on no account admit that the barbarian was of the same stock and blood as themselves. So neither will the high-caste Hindoo admit that people not born Hindoos are of the same blood as themselves, and even the high-caste deny equality of blood to the low-caste man. So the Chinese of to-day regard all other people as “foreign devils,” not simply as people belonging to foreign countries, but as being of devilish origin, just as they pride themselves upon being of celestial origin. But Paul sets them right here. The unity of the Godhead and his universal lordship is followed by the necessary corollary of the unity of the race. He “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.” God is the Creator of the whole earth, and the family of men that dwell upon it are one creation, and were intended to dwell, not in any single part, but upon the whole face of the earth. Thus Paul taught them that no favored races or families could claim precedence over other men, at least so far as their origin was concerned. The lowliest barbarian is the blood kinsman of the haughtiest Athenian. They both sprung from the same stock. This truth lies at the basis of the great doctrine of the universal brotherhood of man, and, properly understood, should modify the pride of the favorite peoples, and inspire the hope of those who hitherto have been downtrodden. This truth properly understood works the death of all political and social slavery.

3. The universality of God’s providence.—Not only is God the Author of the human race, but the great Disposer of its destinies.

Are men scattered over the whole face of the earth? Are nations settled within bounds? God has so ordained this; it has not come about by chance. He "hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." If proud and imperious kings, generals, and rulers of men suppose that they have arranged the map of the world and demarked the boundaries of the nations, they are mistaken. God has done this, though he may have used and overruled the passions and selfish interests of men to further his purpose. This means, in fact, that God is in all history, and that all the affairs of men are subject to the control and regulation of his providence. If this is true of nations, it is no less true of individuals.

4. The true end and mission of man.—To what purpose was the world created and man placed upon it, and then scattered by families and nations all over the face of the earth? To what end were men divided into nations and governments, and institutions formed among them? God had a purpose in all this. What is that purpose? Paul answers the question: "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him." This is the grand quest of man, to find God and be conformed to his image. God did not create man in final perfection—that would have been to make him a machine; but he created and endowed him with a moral and spiritual nature with needs and aspirations that would search after God, in finding whom he would find his own true center and the end of his being. Therefore of old the exhortation was, "Seek ye the Lord," and the promise was, "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." (Is. lv, 6; Jer. xxix, 13.) Nor is this search all on one side, for Jesus tells us that God himself is seeking after men to worship him—that is, to come into fellowship with him. (John iv, 23.) Following this matter up, the Apostle encourages men thus to seek after God, assuring them that he is "not far from every one of us." God is nigh unto all that call upon him. He assures us that "in him we live and move and have our being." In support of this he quotes from one of their own poets who had gotten a large hint of this truth, who said, "For we are also his offspring." Here, then, is the great truth concerning God and man. God created us for himself, placed us in this world, and spread over us a provident care—all that we might seek after him, even as he is seeking for us, in order that, coming together, not mechanically or by arbitrary compulsion, but spiritually and voluntarily, God might have delight in our voluntary love and we might joy in spiritual knowledge of and companionship with God.

5. The folly of idolatry.—This being the case, the Apostle points out to them the absurdity of idolatry. Accepting both the declaration of their own poet, as well as the higher truth of revelation, he shows how utterly inconsistent it is for the offspring of God to conceive of the Godhead as in any wise represented by gold, silver, or stone, “graven by art and man’s device.” How degrading a conception this is! Paul alludes both to the material and to the handling of the material. For a magnificent sarcasm on idolatry the reader is referred to Isaiah xlv, 9-20, which is the basis of a former study in this series.

III.—THE SPIRITUAL CRISIS IN THE WORLD'S HISTORY.

Naturally enough there would arise in the minds of his hearers, as the thought that has, no doubt, arisen in ours: If this, indeed, was God’s thought and purpose in the creation of the world and man, and in his providential care over the race, why has he so long delayed in making his will known to man and giving him the clue to the purpose of his creation? Paul, in part at least, meets the thought in what he says in verses thirty and thirty-one, in which he sets before us all time.

1. The past.—For thousands of years the world has lain in darkness and ignorance. The search after God has been a blind one, and men indeed had lost their way in the wilderness of idolatry and false philosophy. How this state of darkness came about Paul tells, not because they had no light, but “because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, . . . but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Esteeming themselves to be wise, they became fools.” (Rom. i, 19-25.) Following the light of nature, they might have found God; but rejecting this light and seeking unto their own understanding, they came into darkness. But God did not entirely cast off the heathen world. He still kept watch and ward over them providentially, and as for their ignorance, sin, and wandering in darkness, it has seemed as though he had “winked at it,” or rather passed it by. Certainly he has not hitherto dealt with the heathen world in judgment, but has suffered it for the past time. That in these dark nations there have been earnest souls who have searched after God and found him, we cannot doubt, for we know that “in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.” And we need not hesitate to add, “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth

them from all sin," even as it does us who believe. So much for the past: God has borne with it and suffered it to go its own way.

2. The present.—Turning from the past to the present, Paul sets before his hearers the fact that a new crisis has arisen, and that God once more turns to the whole world and speaks directly and authoritatively to all men. "But now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." This is why Paul is in Athens preaching Jesus and the resurrection, testifying repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel comes with a command, urgent as imperative, insistent as it is urgent. "Repent! Repent!! Repent!!!" This is the present mighty cry. Change your mind, and accept God's truth about things. Change your course of life, and walk in God's highway of holiness. This is the way of life. Let us not suppose that this is a Gospel for heathen only. It is for those who in so-called Christian lands have been walking in darkness and in ignorance of the true God, serving idols of lust, pleasure, and ambition. It is time that they should know that the day for winking at sin is past and the time for repentance has come. This is the present duty. Repent. "Now is the accepted time."

3. The future.—Turning from past and present to the future, the Apostle emphasizes his argument by calling their attention to the future. God has appointed a day of judgment. Time is in God's hands, as well as nations and boundaries. He has fixed a day in the future when the quest will be over, and men shall appear before his judgment-seat and give an account of their doings. There they must account for the past and the present of their day and opportunities. The rule of that judgment will be righteousness. Nothing will be done or determined in mere sovereignty or in arbitrariness, but all done in righteousness. Moreover, he has appointed that the judgment shall be in the hands of a Man, one touched with every feeling of our infirmities, and who was tempted in all points like as we are, and thus in perfect human sympathy with us; moreover, one who loved us and died for us, to bring us to God. Jesus is not only the world's Redeemer, but he is also the world's Judge. Happy the man who accepts him as redeemer, then as judge he can and will do nothing but confirm the sentence and judgment of grace and mercy already spoken in the Gospel. If he is rejected as redeemer, then he must be met as judge, and the full sentence of righteousness will be pronounced and carried out. (Rom. ii, 1-16.) In proof of this proposition Paul appeals to the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. "Whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him" (Jesus) "from the dead." The

historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the foundation upon which all Gospel preaching must be done ; it is the foundation fact upon which the judgment of God in righteousness must be proclaimed. That God has raised up Jesus from the dead is incontrovertibly true. Dr. Thomas Arnold of Rugby, the most famous teacher England ever had, and the peer of any professor in his specialty, which was that of history, which he taught at the university of Oxford, says :

“I have been used for many years to study the history of other times, to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the mind of a fair inquirer, than that Christ died and rose again from the dead.”

XXX.

PAUL AT CORINTH.—Acts xviii, 1-11.

(1) After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; (2) And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla, (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome,) and came unto them. (3) And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: (for by their occupation they were tentmakers.) (4) And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. (5) And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. (6) And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. (7) And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. (8) And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. (9) Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: (10) For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. (11) And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.—Acts xviii, 1-11.

Paul's experience and work at Athens were not altogether fruitless. Some clave unto him. Among them two distinguished persons: "Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris." Yet he never went back to that city, never wrote an epistle to it, for he never founded a church there. This was the only city in which he had not been persecuted, either by the people of his own nation or the heathen. This was the first and only time he had preached to an exclusively cultivated audience. He was quite their equal, and showed himself a master both of argument and rhetoric in his famous address, but he always felt that his Athenian experience was a defeat; and he left the city with a heavy and discouraged heart, as we know from the state of mind he was in when he arrived at Corinth, "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." (I. Cor. ii, 3.) Art has assigned to that famous Mars' Hill oration the most famous place or act in Paul's life, and our chief thought of Paul in picture is associated with him as he stood there amid the splendid monuments of that city, with outstretched hands preaching to that

congregation of wise men. Perhaps if Paul could have been consulted, that would have been the one experience in his whole ministry which he would have had blotted out and forgotten. But why? Just because he felt that the Gospel was not in power there; that he had been led into a possibly false attitude toward those learned men—those Stoics and Epicureans. He had not indeed shunned to declare the Gospel, but he had descended to mere philosophical discussion of abstract themes. He had not, it may be, boldly proclaimed Jesus as the Christ; he had not dealt vigorously with the gross sins of the people; he had perhaps allowed himself to be a little influenced by the human motive of being as wise and polished as his audience. This is his own estimate of the matter, not ours. This we learn from what he said to the Corinthians. (I. Cor. ii, 1-5.) Howbeit, God did not leave him without some witness. How often it is the case with us that on those occasions when apparently we are most honored by men we are least in power with them. These Athenians listened to him with a lazy, half curious courtesy, some of them with a languid interest, but others turned coldly and sneeringly away from him as a mere “babbling.” They did not oppose him or attempt to refute his doctrine; some even said that they would hear him again, some time at their convenience. This indifference to his message, this cold-hearted courtesy, just about broke his heart. He would have gladly welcomed a shower of stones, or a hustling at the hands of a mob, rather than that frigid indifference. But Paul did not wait for the philosophers to come back to him at their convenience. He departed at once from Athens and came to Corinth.

I.—ARRIVING AT CORINTH.

The distance between Athens and Corinth was only about forty or at most fifty miles. He probably made the journey partly by water and partly on foot. There is no more interesting event in the life of Paul than the one now before us. Luke relates the incidents very briefly, and only gives us the outside of the picture; the lights and shadows are worked in incidentally by the Apostle himself in his epistles to the church which he founded at Corinth.

1. The city of Corinth.—Athens was a free Greek city; Corinth was the Roman capital of Achaia. Athens was a city given up to elegant leisure and philosophical culture; Corinth was a busy commercial metropolis situated on a narrow isthmus of land, having a port on either side, through which gateways came to her all the commerce and all the scum both of Europe and Asia. Corinth was

to Athens what Glasgow is to Edinburgh. Corinth has been compared both to London and to Paris,—busy, rich and opulent, crowned with commerce and bustling with traffic, the center of Eastern trade at that time, like Venice in later days. At the same time, her citizens were luxurious, pleasure-loving, extremely sensual, and altogether given up to the world, the flesh, and the devil. One cannot read the epistles to the church in this city without gathering an impression of the existence of the same state of things as that with which secular history furnishes us. The contrast between Mars' Hill and the streets or market-places of Corinth was striking and immense. Into this maelstrom of luxury and license, of trade and politics, Paul had come with a sore and lonely heart.

2. The Apostle.—We have just said that Paul entered the city with a sore and lonely heart. He was, as a matter of fact, still alone, Silas and Timothy being detained at Thessalonica. He had come away from Athens discouraged, mortified, and crestfallen. The mercury was down to the freezing-point with him. We can fancy him, a man of no striking appearance, and more than usually dejected, entering that city alone, without so much as one friend in it. What cared or what knew Corinth who had come? He was the ambassador of Heaven bringing the greatest message ever delivered to this world. (II. Cor. v, 20.) But they were unmindful of him. The marts were busy, the theaters full, and the interests of trade and intoxications of pleasure were at their height, when the greatest man ever in Corinth, the one destined to make it more distinguished than anything in her past or present history had done, entered its streets alone and unnoticed, except, perhaps, to excite a passing sneer or curse because he was a Jew. So came Paul into Corinth. So many another servant of God has come unknown, and, it may be poor, and friendless into our city or town, and we have not known that a great man and a prophet was among us. So there come into the towns and cities from the country poor boys and men who in the providence and purpose of God may prove very princes and nobles. Let us learn the needful lesson of being courteous to strangers, any one of whom may be an apostle or an angel.

3. The outlook.—We have already spoken of the general condition of society in Corinth. There was a large company of Jews in the city, greatly augmented of late by an influx from Rome, owing to a recent decree of banishment uttered against them. Paul was not, as we have also seen, in very high spirits. On the other hand, he was suffering from a very bad fit of despondency and discouragement. "In weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." He

was in Europe, and, short of Rome, in the chief city. He saw little to cheer him. He knew the temper of his countrymen the Jews—they had always persecuted him; he had had enough of philosophers, even if they were to be found in the city. Of the rich he had little hope, swallowed up, as they were, in their pursuit after gain, and immersed in the common vices of the fashionable and dissolute society which reigned in Corinth. As for the mass of the people, they were apparently the vilest of the vile. We learn from his first epistle, and indeed from all his writing to the church of Corinth, out of what material the church was gathered: "Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners" (I. Cor. vi, 9-11), and such like. From the top to the bottom the whole city was rotten. What prospect had he of winning their attention to the Gospel, much less of winning their hearts to God? But this very condition of things was God's opportunity to do great, wondrous, and gracious things with his servant and by the power of his grace. Paul's discouragement in Corinth ought to help us when we find ourselves in similar straits.

II.—PAUL'S FIRST HOME IN CORINTH.

Paul did not plunge into work on his first arrival. We do not hear of him in the market-place or reasoning with the Jews at once. His first care was to find a home where he might rest himself and recover his spirits. There was not a Christian in all the city. To whom should he go, to whom apply for lodgings?

1. Aquila and Priscilla.—He naturally turned to his own countrymen. Upon inquiry he ascertained that there was a certain Jew and his wife who were of the city of Pontus, not far from his own home at Tarsus, who had recently resided in Rome and were now in Corinth, having been expelled from the imperial city with the rest of the Jews. Two considerations most likely led Paul to seek lodgings with this family. First, they were of his own country, that is, in Asia; then, secondly, they were of his own craft, tent-makers. It is not likely that this good man and his wife were Christians, but they were devout Jews, and being of the same craft would recommend them to Paul. We know that later on they became converts, most likely very soon after Paul became an inmate of their house, and subsequently were most helpful "laborers together" with Paul in the Gospel. In this house Paul took refuge and found rest. It was a time when he needed to commune with his own heart and with God, and to review the situation. He was like a general who

had been beaten in an important engagement, and before going into battle again must needs pull himself together.

2. Laboring with his own hands.—It was one of Paul's strong points that he would not be burdensome to any one, nor beholden to any for his support, and especially (later on) would he never take a penny from this rich Corinthian church for his own necessities. Like every other Jew, whether rich or poor, he had been taught a mechanical trade. He was a tent-maker, and engaging to dwell with Aquila, he also set about laboring with his own hands to earn his own living. Tent-making must ever after be an honorable calling since Paul worked at it, just as carpentering ought to be the noblest of trades since Jesus wrought at the carpenter's bench. Neither Jesus nor Paul would be admitted into the society of modern "gentlemen," on account of their mechanical pursuits, but they both belonged to the aristocracy of the kingdom of heaven. When a man is ashamed to work with his own hands if there be need, then he ceases to be like a son of God or a servant of Jesus Christ. It was probably while sitting together at their work that Paul won Aquila over to Christ. Discouraged as he was with public work, he could not keep still in private. The fire in his soul was burning, though it burned low; yet it kindled up with this new material brought fresh to his hand. Let us learn that souls may be won in the workshop as well as in the church, by private conversation as well as by public preaching. If only there be the heart to speak for Christ, there need never lack an opportunity for soul-winning.

III.—AT IT AGAIN.

Paul was not a man to be long depressed, idle, or unfruitful in his service for Christ. It is true that he did not now spend all the days of the week in preaching and talking in the market-places. There was present necessity for him to earn some money for his support, and so he thus occupied his days; but during all the weeks of his engagement with Aquila he found time for public service. Once a man gets a taste of soul-winning, he cannot keep out of that work long. He may have his periods of discouragement and depression; he may be in secular employ; but give up work for God he cannot if ever he has been rightly in it.

1. In the synagogues.—Every Sabbath-day he went to the synagogue, and there, according to custom, he reasoned with the Jews, endeavoring to persuade both them and the Greeks, many of whom also attended the synagogues, either as "out-and-out prose-

lytes," or men weary with idolatry and sin, and who were attracted by the religion of the Jews. We fancy these "reasoning," calm, and earnest, but not reaching to the height of direct and vehement appeal. He was laying foundations for more aggressive ministry presently.

2. The arrival of friends.—At this juncture, after several weeks, Silas and Timotheus came over from Thessalonica and joined Paul in Corinth. It must have been a great joy and comfort to him to welcome these cherished friends to Corinth. They were a welcome reinforcement, and tended greatly to strengthen his hands and to inspire him with a new zeal for the work. We all of us know something of the effect of such reinforcements upon our own minds and hearts, and also upon our efforts.

3. Opposition in the synagogue.—From the moment of the arrival of his friends Paul seems to have taken a more direct and positive tone in his preaching. He ceased to reason with his hearers, and began to testify to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. He was "pressed in spirit" to do this. The conviction of the truth, his longing desire to see his countrymen embrace Christ, and jealousy for Christ himself, all stirred within him by the Spirit, until he became vehement and insistent in his pressure upon the Jews. This provoked them to anger and opposition. Probably Paul pointed out to them the sin of their rejection of Christ, and identified it with that of the whole nation, who had rejected and crucified him. At any rate they resented his labors, assumed an attitude of active opposition, and began to blaspheme (most likely the name of Jesus). This brought to an end all their work in the synagogue.

4. Paul turns from the Jews.—Paul, having just cause for what he did, and seeing that further work with the Jews was useless, and yet, we can well believe, with a sad heart though an indignant one, turned from the Jews, and like an old prophet, "shook his raiment and said unto them: Your blood be upon your own heads"—no doubt having in mind Ezekiel xxxiii, 7-9. He had cleared his skirts of their blood by fairly teaching and warning them. If now they deliberately rejected Christ and thus committed spiritual suicide, the guilt of it was upon their own heads and not upon his soul. There comes a time when it is folly to press men further, and we must leave them; but let us be sure that we do not turn away in anger before we have exhausted every means for their salvation. With this incident begins the breach between Paul and the Jews, and he becomes more and more committed to the Gentiles. The Rubicon was crossed, the bridges burnt, and henceforth the Gospel is fairly launched in Gentile waters.

IV.—A NEW DEPARTURE.

Having abandoned the Jews per force, he had to give up the synagogue as a place of preaching. A new place must be found.

1. The house of Justus.—Paul departed from Athens and came to Corinth; he now departed thence from the synagogue and took refuge in the house of Justus, a proselyte who lived next door to the synagogue. This was henceforth to be his headquarters, and thither both those Jews who had not hardened their hearts and the Greeks who were interested might resort. This Justus was a man “that worshiped God”—a kind of Cornelius in Corinth, who, no doubt, like Cornelius and Aquila, became converts to Christ. If one door is shut to us it is pretty certain that God will open another, and sometimes hard by.

2. The conversion of Crispus.—Here was a bit of encouragement for Paul. The principal Jews of the synagogue had headed the opposition which led to the withdrawal of Paul. After he had taken up his abode with Justus, there came out with him one Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, “with all his house,” openly confessed the Lord, and was (as we learn elsewhere) baptized by Paul’s own hands. It needed just this opposition to bring Crispus out into open confession, just as it needed the crucifixion of Christ to bring out Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea into open confession. This family was a great acquisition, and formed the nucleus of the church at Corinth. Thank God, at last the work began to move.

3. The conversion of the Corinthians.—By this time there was no small stir in that part of the city. Many of the Corinthians were drawn to the house of Justus, and, hearing the Gospel, believed and were baptized. Thus the work spread and increased, and believers were daily added to the number already confessing Christ.

V.—GOOD CHEER.

The narrative here is very brief; but it is evident that a storm was brewing, most likely from the Jewish quarter. The defection of Crispus was a terrible blow to the Jews who had opposed Paul. They saw that he was winning strength every day with both Jews and Greeks. Perhaps they had also heard from Thessalonica, where the Jews were very bitter and aggressive. Something had occurred to incline Paul to leave Corinth. We may be sure that it was not cowardice, but perhaps a sort of discouraged prudence, and a great

hesitancy to become the object and center of another riot. It was a crisis with him, and it was beautifully met and passed.

1. The appearance of Jesus.—At this crisis there appeared to Paul in the night a vision of Jesus. Most likely, in this case, Jesus was actually present. More than once had this honor been vouchsafed to him. He was fighting a great battle, and almost single handed. It was meet that he should have extraordinary encouragement and help. Such encouragement and help God will not withhold from any of his servants who are faithfully fighting his battles with the forces of sin and the powers of darkness.

2. The message.—Jesus spake to Paul in the vision and said to him words which must have turned his muscles into steel and his heart into flint for hardness of purpose and determination. (i) "Be not afraid." Then Paul *had been a little afraid* of bodily injury. Well, no wonder! The bruises of the rods on his back were yet scarcely healed, and the rough experiences he had had at Thessalonica and Berea had shaken him considerably. No wonder if there was a physical shrinking from another similar experience. Was this to be the constant and invariable lot meted out to him? In every city was he to be set upon and beaten and stoned? No! God had proved him, and now he will give him rest from persecution. (ii) "Speak." The testimony must now be kept up. It was a time to speak out boldly. "Let it be done." This was no time for running away or for silence. (iii) "Hold not thy peace." The ball was at his foot, let him keep it rolling and he would soon reach the goal. (iv) "I am with thee." This is the original promise renewed. It must have been sweet music to Paul's soul. If the Master was to be with him and stand by him, then it mattered not what might come, he would stand his ground and live or die with equal delight. (v) "No man shall set on thee to hurt thee." Here is a safeguard offered. Henceforth Paul was to fight behind unseen walls and in a fortress that was impregnable. Besides, even if in the open, God could restrain the wrath of men and hold back every uplifted hand. How precious to know that relief is always possible and sure whenever it is best that it should come! Sometimes it is best that the battle-field should be watered with the blood of the martyrs; sometimes it is necessary for the servants of God to go to prison in order to win the jailer; or to be stoned as Stephen was in order that Saul of Tarsus might be convicted of sin and convinced of the truth.

3. God's hidden ones.—We look over a vast city or congregation, and we see people from the outside only. But God sees the hearts, and he saw that in that city there were many people who

would receive the Gospel. Paul must not go away, because it was necessary that they should have the testimony. God already claimed them as his own, though as yet they were not converted. He who saw Nathanael before he was under the fig-tree, who saw the Eunuch riding in his chariot studying Isaiah, now saw many people in this city of Corinth whose hearts were honest and who would believe when they heard. So God has his hidden ones in every city. Let this encourage us; though we do not see or know them, *God does*, and he will bring them to the light.

4. A year and six months.—And so Paul continued a year and six months in that city, teaching the word of God among them. It takes time to evangelize a city or a district, and the workers need to have patience, and, if need be, abide a year and six months, or even three whole years, as Paul did in Ephesus. May God give us patience as well as courage and good cheer with which to do his work.

XXXI.

PAUL AT EPHESUS.—Acts xix, 1-12.

(1) And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus; and finding certain disciples, (2) He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. (3) And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. (4) Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. (5) When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. (6) And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. (7) And all the men were about twelve. (8) And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. (9) But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. (10) And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. (11) And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: (12) So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.—Acts xix, 1-12.

During the latter part of Paul's stay at Corinth the Jews succeeded in getting up a turbulent insurrection against him, and had him summoned before Gallio, the Roman proconsul, who, when he heard the ground of their complaint, dismissed the Apostle with courtesy and drove the Jews out of his court with contempt. Thus God raised up a friend for Paul in an utterly indifferent unbeliever. The Greeks in reprisal set upon the chief ruler of the synagogue and beat him. Some time after this Paul left Corinth to make a special visit to Jerusalem, there to fulfill some vow, the nature of which we do not know. He took with him Aquila and Priscilla, who accompanied him as far as Ephesus, and there remained. Paul tarried in Ephesus over one Sabbath and proceeded rapidly to Jerusalem, having promised the Ephesian Jews to return to their city after having accomplished his business at Jerusalem. Having finished at Jerusalem he called at Antioch, and then started on his return to Ephesus overland, visiting the churches scattered through the mountainous

districts of Asia Minor. In the meantime, after Paul had left Ephesus there came to that city a very remarkable man, Apollos by name, a native of Alexandria. He was remarkable for his deep knowledge of the Scripture, for his fervent zeal and piety, and especially for his unequalled eloquence and ability in logic. It seems that, Jew though he was, he had been made acquainted with the teachings of John the Baptist, either at first hand, before Christ's ministry began, or at second hand, through some of John's disciples. He had embraced the teachings of the Baptist concerning the near advent of the Messiah, and had been baptized in that faith. He had not heard of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, nor of the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This is not wonderful, considering the fact that the story of these great events was just now penetrating beyond the boundaries of western Asia. At Alexandria they had not yet heard these things. Apollos, however, was a burning witness of the "things of the Lord"—that is, of Christ as set forth in the Old Testament Scriptures. He was diligent in propagating the doctrines of John the Baptist, and boldly spoke these things in the synagogues. Aquila and Priscilla recognized in this eloquent man a kindred spirit, and saw that he was practically one with the Christians, though he was evidently ignorant of the fact that the Messiah whom he was preaching was at hand, had already come, had been crucified and raised from the dead. They therefore took him to their house, and themselves having been fully informed of all these things by Paul, they in turn taught Apollos in the way of the Lord more perfectly; that is, they filled up to him what he had hitherto lacked in the knowledge of the facts. Apollos eagerly accepted the further facts and truths concerning Jesus, and at once became an eloquent preacher of the Gospel. Having learned of Aquila of what had been accomplished in Corinth, he was moved with desire to visit that city, hoping and believing that in the absence of Paul he might be of help and use to that new church. His ministry there was, we know, mighty, and though he watered what Paul had planted, he was the unconscious means of making a party in the church in this city. (Acts xviii, 24-28; I. Cor. iii, 1-8.) Good men may be made the instruments in the hands of bad men to accomplish their purposes. Wise men may be used by unwise men to work unconscious mischief in the Church of God. No doubt this was the misfortune of Apollos. He was so eloquent and powerful a preacher that he drew men to him in passionate devotion. Some of Paul's converts grew jealous of this rising star, and resented the pre-eminence he was attaining in Corinth; and so parties arose, some

for Paul and some for Apollos. We must now return to Paul and the events which were occurring in Ephesus.

I.—THE TWELVE EPHESIAN DISCIPLES.

Apollos had left Ephesus some time before Paul had returned. On the return of the latter to Ephesus according to his promise, he found certain disciples there who in some way attracted his particular attention. They were evidently disciples, consorting with the believers, and belonging to the advanced party of the Jews. Yet there was evidently something lacking in them. Perhaps they were severe in their manners, austere in their practices, and wanting in that joyfulness which characterized the early Christians. At any rate, Paul was not a man to live in the dark in respect to any man or set of men with whom he came in contact. So in his straightforward manner he sought these twelve men out (they seemed to have been a little party by themselves standing between the unbelieving Jews and the Christians) and inquired of them as to the nature of their faith and experience. He asked them the direct question: "Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?" This is the true reading of the passage. To which they replied that they had heard nothing about the Holy Ghost, neither at the time of their baptism nor since. Paul then inquired unto what they had been baptized; that is, what was the nature of the doctrine they had received and the present object of their faith. To this they made answer that they had been baptized unto John's baptism. This was the explanation of the matter. Like Apollos they had heard of John's ministry, and the things of the Lord as interpreted by that great prophet-preacher, and had embraced the hope of the coming Messiah. They had heartily yielded themselves up as penitent believers in the coming Christ, but had not since heard that Jesus had actually come, "died for their sins according to the Scriptures, and been raised again from the dead." John indeed had preached that when Jesus came he would baptize the disciples with the Holy Ghost; but since these disciples had not heard of the coming of Christ as an accomplished event, and the subsequent pouring out of the Holy Ghost, they had not of course received that great gift and blessing. It was not that they had never heard of the Holy Ghost at all, for every Jew (and these were Jews) was familiar with the Holy Spirit of God and his work among the people; but they had not heard of the Holy Spirit as the special gift of God to the members of Messiah's kingdom—that is, to the personal believers in Jesus

Christ, not as the *coming* Saviour, but as *having come*, died, and risen again from the dead. Paul speaks in terms of profoundest respect of John's ministry, but points out to these men wherein it had come short, necessarily, of the whole truth, and then instructs them fully in the great facts and truths concerning Jesus Christ. (v. 4.) They listened to this communication of Paul with gladness, and were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hitherto they had believed that Christ was coming, and in view of his near and expected advent they had turned from their old life and were living in loyal expectation of his coming. We cannot but admire the faithfulness with which these men had hung on to the hope which John had set before them. After their baptism Paul laid his hands upon them and immediately they received the gift of the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with tongues and to prophesy. This was the sign given especially to the earlier converts, as witness the case of the Pentecostal converts, and to the Samaritan believers, as well as to Cornelius and his household. In their peculiar circumstances Paul hardly regarded their baptism as being Christian, inasmuch as it did not include a belief, not even a knowledge of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. But the essential thing with him was not so much the water baptism (which was most likely administered by some one else) as the gift of the Holy Spirit. The consideration of the whole matter is suggestive of several thoughts concerning these disciples.

1. They were disciples.—They are thus spoken of before they had been instructed in the things of Christ and rebaptized. They occupied a very different relation toward Christ and his kingdom from that of the unbelieving Jews. They had practically accepted him in the promise of his advent, and had separated themselves unto him from their old Jewish standing. It is true that they stood as it were on the very outer edges of the kingdom, but yet were recognized as being *in it*. They occupied a different position from that of the scribe of whom Jesus said: "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." (Mark xii, 34.) He was not far *from* the kingdom; they were not far *in* the kingdom. They were not far in, it is true, but then they were in, and that makes all the difference in the world. This wideness in God's mercy is that which charms us, and makes us glad to welcome among the disciples those who are on the very outermost edges of the kingdom. Not that we are content that they should stay in that position, but that we are glad they are come so far in, and so may be taken by the hand and helped on their way farther in and higher up.

2. They were defective in their knowledge.—Now it is of the

utmost importance that we should grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Correct and thorough teaching in the facts and doctrines of Christianity is certainly essential to permanency and growth in the divine life; but one may be saved and be a true disciple of the Lord Jesus with very imperfect knowledge of him. There are thousands of little children who are true disciples of Christ, who yet do not understand the significance of the atonement or the new birth; that is, they have no theological knowledge of it. Yet they believe in Jesus and are saved. There are multitudes of heathen converts here in India whose knowledge of these things is very limited; yet they are true disciples. They are Christ's little ones, whom many are offending most grievously. They need much teaching, and very great and patient handling, but they are nevertheless disciples, and must be acknowledged as such, unless we are to come to the edge of the sea with a millstone about our necks.

3. They were defective in their experience.—As disciples they were entitled to all the blessings of the Holy Spirit, but as yet they were short of that blessed experience and knew nothing of it. They did not know that such a blessing was in store for them. But are there not many Christians, true disciples, among us, who, though they have heard of the Holy Spirit and seen the evidences of his presence in other disciples, are themselves without the personal experience of his teaching? Does not this account for the presence in the Church of so many dull, joyless, inactive disciples, to whom the service of God is heaviness, and who are strangers to the light and happy life of the Spirit-filled disciple? Yet they are disciples. What they need is what these Ephesian disciples needed, *and obtained*. The same blessing is in reserve for all who will seek after it. "God is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him than we are to give good gifts to our children."

4. They were very frank and humble.—When questioned concerning their standing and experience in the Christian life they did not take offense, and turn away in a huff from the Apostle, but frankly told him the whole truth concerning themselves, frankly accepted the further teaching he had to give them, and immediately submitted to a *rebaptism* in the name of Jesus, in order to make their standing and position right outwardly, and in order to rectify and complete so far their own spiritual life. Teachableness and humility were sure signs that these untaught disciples were, after all, true disciples. That man is far from the kingdom, whatever his profession may be, who is not willing to be taught, and who resents any inquiry into the state of his spiritual life.

5. They were progressive.—There are some professors of religion who resent any experience that is in advance of their own. If some one intimates to them that there is a plane of life higher than that on which they are living; or an experience of power which they do not possess; or a measure of joyfulness to which they are strangers; or a state of victory over sin which they have never known—they set it down at once to fanaticism, and withdraw themselves as far as possible in the opposite direction. Their answer to the doctrine of assurance is to boast of their doubts; their answer to the doctrine of holiness and the keeping power of God is a loose, worldly life, and a certain kind of pride in their many falls and failings, which they confess with a mock spirit of humility, as if humility consisted in the acknowledgment of sinful indulgence. This kind of humility, which refuses to “go on to perfection,” to “perfecting holiness in the fear of God,” to “follow on to know the Lord,” is often nothing more than spiritual stubbornness, downright laziness, or a cloak for the indulgence of the flesh. These disciples, however, were of a different sort. They did not dishonor their old master John the Baptist by leaving him for Christ, nor their repentance when they went on to faith. Indeed, this progressive spirit of theirs put honor on the very past things which they left. The true motto of the Christian is that of Paul: “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

6. They were richly rewarded for their teachableness and obedience to the advanced truth.—So soon as they had been baptized in the name of Jesus, and thus took their forward stand and position, the Apostle laid his hands upon them and they received a wonderful baptism of the Holy Spirit, which showed itself at once in two familiar ways: they began to speak with tongues and to prophesy. What a change had come over those heavy-eyed, sad-faced, and austere disciples of John the Baptist! They stepped as it were out of a darkened chamber into the broad sunlight. They became almost new creatures. So it is with all disciples who have been living below their privileges in Christ, if, when they see the truth, they step into it, and follow on to know the Lord. The distance between a joyful, triumphant, and useful life and a joyless, broken, and useless one is oftentimes but a step. Why shall not all of us who are living in the shadows of life take that step, and henceforth live in God's sunshine?

II.—PAUL IN THE SYNAGOGUE.

The break which occurred between the Apostle and the Jews at Corinth (not to speak of all that he had suffered at their hands elsewhere) did not quench the deep and tender love which he had for them, and the longing desire he always felt for their salvation. He had indeed been well received by the Jews at Ephesus as he passed through on his way from Corinth to Jerusalem, which led to a promise on his part to revisit the city. Having met with and corrected the faulty type of faith in the twelve disciples of John the Baptist whom he found on his first return, he is next found in the synagogue as his custom was.

1. A three months' siege.—Paul was not a man who ever did things by halves. We are struck everywhere with the fact of his persistency and the time element in his work. It is true that he tarried but a little while in Athens, but there was special reason for that sudden change of base. Here in Ephesus he stayed altogether three years. In the beginning he spent three months exclusively with the Jews, and went "into the synagogue and spake boldly, . . . disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God." We understand by disputing not angry controversy or contradiction, but earnest argument conducted by asking and answering questions on either side. Religious convictions are not easily changed, and especially are not religious prejudices easily overcome. Patient, bold, and earnest persistency is required, if we are to win even with the truth, a victory over ignorance, prejudice, and bigotry.

2. The hardening of the heart.—The truth received and submitted to, softens and converts the heart, and works renewal of nature; but the truth persistently controverted and stubbornly resisted, hardens the heart. Among the Jews here, there were some who hardened their hearts, and would not receive the truth; that is, they rejected the truth against their own conviction. The result was that they were hardened against Jesus Christ. "To-day if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts." (Ps. xcvi, 8; Rom. xi, 7; Heb. iii, 13.) This because unbelief willfully indulged deadens the religious sensibilities and destroys the power of the soul to believe. Nothing is more dangerous than for a man willfully to set himself against an honest conviction, especially if it be a spiritual one.

3. Separation from unbelievers.—The Jews were not content with simply rejecting the testimony of the Scriptures to Christ, but

having rejected Christ, they began to do as the Jews had done in Corinth—they “spake evil of that way before the multitude.” This is not a simple argument against Christ, but it was an abusive, blasphemous tone which they took up toward Jesus, “that Way.” They revived and retailed with additions the scandals and blasphemies which the Jews in Jerusalem had hurled at Christ. Paul would have borne any amount of evil spoken against himself; but when they began to speak evil of his Lord, then it was time for him to desist from all further communion with them. So he “departed from them.” We do not know that he shook his garment and pronounced the judgment of “blood guiltiness” upon them as he did in Corinth; but he turned his back finally upon the synagogue, though he gladly continued to preach to such Jews as would come to him. There is a time when, reluctant as we may be to do it, it becomes necessary to separate ourselves.

4. The church at Ephesus.—This separation of Paul from the synagogue, at which time he carried away with him all the disciples, the twelve, and such Jews from the synagogue as believed, to “the school of one Tyrannus,” whom we assume to have been a disciple, and there “the church which is at Ephesus” was formed. As the house of Justus hard by the synagogue in Corinth offered a place of meeting for the young church there, so the school-room of Tyrannus offered a refuge for the young church here. We do not read that either of these houses was specially consecrated for the purpose. In apostolic times the people were of much more importance than the church building, as the words and doctrines that proceeded out of the preacher’s mouth were of more importance than the vestments in which he was arrayed.

III.—SPECIAL MIRACLES.

Ephesus, though a Greek city, was in Asia, and the great Diana of the Ephesians was more of an Indian deity than a Greek goddess. The type of idol-worship there also partook more of the Eastern than of Western character. Gross superstition prevailed among the people; exorcists, magicians, and wonder-workers thrived on all hands. They were as full of tricks and wonderful works as were the Egyptian magicians. In such circumstances, and just on the same principle that God gave special power to Moses to outwork the magicians in Egypt, so here God gave it to Paul to work special miracles. They were out of the common, and calculated peculiarly to impress and persuade the minds of a people who had been educated

as had the Ephesians. The peculiar character of the miracles was in the fact that Paul did not work them directly, but indirectly, by means of handkerchiefs and aprons taken from his body, which, when they were laid on the sick, wrought cure, and when brought in contact with those possessed of devils it exorcised them. There is a hint of this kind of miracle in the case of the woman who stole a blessing by touching the hem of our Lord's outer garment; and in the case of people being healed on whom the shadow of Peter fell. It is not necessary for us to attempt to explain such things. It is enough that it pleased God to show to these ignorant, superstitious people that his was a real and a beneficent power; that his Gospel carried life and healing with it.

XXXII.

PAUL AT MILETUS.—Acts xx, 22–35.

(22) And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: (23) Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. (24) But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. (25) And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. (26) Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. (27) For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. (28) Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. (29) For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. (30) Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. (31) Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. (32) And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. (33) I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. (34) Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. (35) I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.—Acts xx, 22–35.

After three years of extraordinary labor in Ephesus, the ministry of Paul closed amidst battle and storm. (xix, 13–41.) So powerfully and effectually had he preached the Word to both Jew and Greek, that the whole city felt the influence of his words, and not only were the converts affected by the Word of God, but the very heathen themselves who did not become out-and-out Christians were in a measure weaned from the grosser forms of their idolatry. There were certain tradesmen, artificers, who made their living by making small idols, images of Diana, and shrines both for the home and for offering. These tradesmen began to feel the power of the Gospel when their customers fell off. The demand for their wares was sensibly affected by the preaching of Paul. Ostensibly in the interests of the great goddess, but really in their own selfish inter-

est, these tradesmen (under the leadership of one Demetrius, a silversmith) succeeded in working upon the prejudices and superstitions of the populace to such an extent that a mob was assembled, determined to arrest Paul and carry him before the magistrates, and by sheer force succeed in getting him disposed of. They failed, however, to find Paul, and seized upon two of his companions. Paul would have stood loyally by his friends, and even assayed to go in unto the people either to reason with them or to take his place by the side of his brethren in the fray. He was dissuaded from doing so, however, by certain chiefs of Asia who were his friends. The mob came to nothing, except to provoke a scandal in the city and bring it under the censure of the superior authorities of the province. After the tumult had ceased Paul gathered the disciples together (xx, 1), and bidding them farewell, departed, according to a previous plan, to Macedonia. Visiting several places on the way, he came at length into Greece, and thence again through Macedonia on his way to Jerusalem, turning back upon his route because the Jews were lying in wait for him on the other route which he had intended taking. At last we find him at Troas, and then at Miletus, not far from Ephesus. There he tarried and sent for the elders of the church in that city to have a last conference with them before proceeding on his way to Jerusalem, where he desired to be on the coming feast of Pentecost. (v. 16.)

In the address which he delivered to them there is every evidence of deep feeling and great tenderness on the Apostle's part. He first calls their attention to his own conduct as a man and a minister among them for the past three years, saying in all humility what few men or ministers can or could say for themselves. With tears and temptations (trials) he had wrought on, day and night, in public and in private, keeping back nothing of the truth, but urging upon all men the immediate duty and the supreme privilege of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Having said thus much for himself, by way of earning or justifying his right to speak to them further, he proceeds with his address. (v. 22.)

I.—PAUL UNDER ORDERS.

No man who enters the ministry of Jesus Christ is in any true sense his own master. Like a soldier, he must always hold himself in readiness to go or come at the command of the Master. Paul was a true soldier of the Cross. He knew his Master, and was loyal to the heart's core, and ready at any time to lay down any work, how-

ever dear, and take up any new work, however dangerous. Just now he found himself under fresh marching orders.

1. Bound in spirit.—"And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem." By this he means that the Spirit of God had laid it upon him that he must go up to Jerusalem. The command had come to him with the force of bonds. He had no option in the matter. He must go. There is a suggestion of heaviness of spirit here, not because he was unwilling to go, but that there was a presentiment of suffering and peril in the mission upon which he was now about to enter. One may go to work with a cheerful will even when the heart is oppressed with foreboding and dread. Many a soldier has gone into battle with an enthusiasm that has inspired all about him, while at the same time his heart was like lead within him, foreboding his own death, or disaster to the cause he loved.

2. Not knowing.—"Not knowing the things that shall befall me there." This was also a trial. He had a general conviction that he would be in great and deep trouble, but he did not know what the nature of the trials would be. This is harder to face than a known danger. If we know what is to befall us we can prepare for it, face it, and take it cheerfully. It is this walking in darkness and seeing no light, fighting in the dark, not knowing either the character or number of one's foes, that is so trying to the human spirit and so testing to a man's courage. Still there is always this comfort to the Christian, if he himself does not know, he knows that there is one who does, and that he is over all things for good. "It is better to walk in the dark with God than to go alone in the light."

3. Immovable.—"But none of these things move me." He had certain intimations from Christian prophets that "bonds and afflictions" awaited him at Jerusalem, but what the end of it all would be he did not know. However, he said: "None of these things move me." They did not make him hesitate to go; they did not tempt him to ask to be excused from the service; they did not raise any doubts in his mind as to the goodness or wisdom of God; whatever might be the outcome of it all, he did not shrink from the issue, nor was he moved from the steadfastness of his service and devotion to his Master. It was Paul who wrote from Philippi to the Corinthians, and exhorted them to be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." So he was "unmovable" himself in this new crisis of his apostolic life.

4. His ministry.—Paul was called to the ministry of the Gospel by Jesus Christ. It was to him more than life itself. He would have rather laid down his life than his work. "Neither count I my

life dear unto myself." What a speech is this! How ashamed many of us ought to be. We count not life, but even convenience and personal pleasure, dear to ourselves sometimes, even when the work of God is pressing and urgent. But with Paul life counted for very little beside his ministry. There was a course to run, there was a ministry to fulfill, which he had received of the Lord Jesus Christ. This to Paul was both a distinguished honor and a sacred trust. To him it had been given to testify the Gospel of the grace of God both to the Jew and to the Greek. His commission was from Heaven; he was Heaven's ambassador, and no man ever wore the honors of that high office more humbly and discharged its duties more worthily than Paul; and we may add that no man ever took greater and more honorable pride in having been found worthy to be so intrusted. Not until this high idea of the ministerial calling is restored to the Church will there be a return of apostolic power.

II.—PAUL'S FAREWELL.

Paul must have been deeply attached to this Ephesian church; indeed, he could not be otherwise after laboring with them as he had done for three years, not only preaching to them publicly, but visiting them from house to house. He knew them all personally and intimately. To many of them his heart was closely knit. The elders of the church who had now come out to meet him were not only his brethren, they were also his close personal friends. They had shared the burdens and responsibilities of the church together; they had often communed and sat together in heavenly places. Indeed, the whole church seems to have been one of peculiarly heavenly-mindedness. One cannot read the Epistle to the Ephesians without saying: "That must have been a wonderfully spiritual church." What high truth Paul taught them, on what high themes did he write them! At the same time it was a church that had great need for watchfulness, alertness, and steadiness for battle with spiritual powers and darkness in all high places. To them Paul commended "the whole armor of God," and bade them quit themselves in the battle like men. (*Vide* Epistle to the Ephesians.)

1. **A final farewell.**—This incident has been made the basis of many a farewell sermon and parting between pastor and people; but it is doubtful if there has ever been a parting so deeply tender and solemn as this one. Paul knew that it was final. How he knew it we do not know. He did not know what the end of his visit to Jerusalem would be, but he knew that he would never look into the

faces of those beloved brethren again. He could not but associate with them all his labor and ministry. He remembered the circumstances attending the conversion of each one of them. This tender touch is brought out in his words: "Among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God." "I know that ye . . . shall see my face no more." Their broken sobs and tears well-nigh broke his heart. Nor were they less affected than he, for "they all wept sore, . . . sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more." (vs. 37, 38.) There are those who affect to despise emotion and tears, but Paul, who was the farthest from being an emotional or sentimental man, freely indulged his own tears, and suffered his beloved Ephesians to shed theirs freely even upon his neck.

2. A noble challenge.—"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men." This is more than the most of us could say upon leaving our flocks. There was not on his garments so much as a speck of blood. He had been utterly faithful. He had in no wise misrepresented the Gospel, either in speech or action. He had faithfully warned, exhorted, rebuked, and admonished them, and that in no cold and perfunctory way, but with tears. Moreover, he solemnly declared that he had not "shunned to declare . . . all the counsel of God." He had no hobbies which he had ridden among the people, or peculiar view which he was constantly ventilating. Closely studying the Scriptures and earnestly communing with the Holy Ghost, he had brought forth in due proportion "all the counsel of God." He had not spared to set before them the nature and inevitable penalty of sin, nor had he failed in opening up to their faith the fullness and completeness of salvation in Christ. Neither had he confined his preaching to the mere doctrinal statements of the truth; he had been faithful in teaching and training them in practical holiness. Nor had he preached with his mouth only; he had been an example to the whole flock, both in conduct and in the spirit of his labor. Would God that all we who are preachers and teachers might so live and teach as this great man did, so that at the bar of God no souls lost through our idleness, unfaithfulness, or selfishness could stand before us and point to blood-stains on our garments. "All the counsel of God." How one must study his Bible and know well the place of meeting with God and the Holy Spirit to be able to preach all that, and do it wisely and well.

III.—A SOLEMN CHARGE.

So long as the Apostle himself was present with the church at Ephesus there was in a sense not so much need that the elders should feel the weight of responsibility. But now the church was to be left wholly to their oversight. The keen spiritual eye of the Apostle foresaw coming dangers, both from without and from within, which led him to deliver a solemn charge to these elders, who henceforth were alone to be responsible to God for the safety of the flock.

1. The overseers of the flock.—No man assumes the pastoral care of a flock of God's people carelessly, any more than he dares to enter into the ministry of his own will and wish simply. That is, no man *ought* to do so presumptuous a thing. The Holy Ghost calls men to the ministry, and he it is who appoints them to their work. We do not mean that there is no human choice in these matters, or no freedom of the will on the part of the minister; but that these—both the choice and the decision which place men in these positions—are, if they are true servants of God, made under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. "Over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers." The elders were to remember that. They were also to remember that they were to extend their oversight to "all the flock." It is right and proper enough for pastors and teachers to have their special and intimate personal friends, as indeed Jesus had, but in their capacity as overseers of the flock the least and the poorest must have the same care and attention as the greatest and the richest. "All the flock" means each one of the flock. Perhaps that one of the flock who is most disagreeable to us personally, the least appreciative of our care, the most ready to find fault, is the very one who needs the most patient, tender, and loving care and the most watchful oversight. This cannot be extended if it be left to mere human option to do it. Only when we remember that it is God's flock, and that we are doing this service for Jesus himself and not for ourselves or even the person concerned, can we do it. In view of these things the admonition of the Apostle to the elders is peculiarly appropriate: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves." The first provision for the safety of the flock must be made by taking heed to ourselves. A pastor or teacher who does not take heed to himself and carefully guard his own life, and keep it in fellowship with God, and free from the evils of the world, the flesh, and the devil, cannot take care of the flock. A spiritual ministry is essential to a spiritual church. A

wandering shepherd cannot recover wandering sheep. A prayerless pastor cannot provoke his people to prayer. A careless minister cannot induce carefulness in his people. The blind cannot lead the blind, nor can the halt lift the lame over rough places.

2. The blood-bought flock.—"The flock . . . which he hath purchased with his own blood." This consideration ought to go far to make the ministry a most solemn charge. Every member of the Church of Jesus Christ has been purchased by his blood. We are put in charge of jewels that have been bought at infinite cost; it therefore behoves us to extend to them the care which their great value demands. They are Christ's jewels, and we should remember that after all the service is to him. He has given them life, but he has left us to nourish that life with carefully prepared food. The flock must be fed. Not entertained and amused, but fed, and fed on heavenly food—food which must be gathered with great care and pains from the Word of God, which is the only source of strength and culture for redeemed souls.

3. Therefore watch and remember.—The occasion for watchfulness is seen in the fact that there were grievous wolves ready, upon the departure of the Apostle, to spring upon, tear, and devour the flock. And worse, if possible, than that, there were vain and ambitious men in the church who would, unless great watchfulness and care were exercised, rise up and lead away many weak-minded disciples after spiritual fads and doctrinal crotchets, which could not build up the soul, but which, on the other hand, would cause dissension and strife. Watch these things and be ready for the first symptom of danger, or sign of defection and revolt. To help them in this duty the Apostle does not hesitate to recall to them his own manner of life and habits of labor among them. (i) Ceaseless labor, day and night, with tears, had been his habit, with constant teaching and warning. (ii) Utter unselfishness in that labor. He had not coveted their silver and gold, but only themselves for Christ's sake. He calls their attention to the fact that during the three years he had been amongst them, he had with his own hands supported himself, having been careful not to be chargeable to them in anything, deliberately waiving this right for the Gospel's sake. Not only did he support himself, but out of his own earnings he had ministered to many of the poorer members of the church, thereby leaving them an example of what the real spirit of a pastor to his people ought to be. To live and work, and to give rather than to receive, was according to a precept of our Lord's which says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Paul thought nothing so lofty and

desirable as to be like his Master in anything and everything. He does not say that this must be so with all ministers, but he found it advisable in his case, and moreover he delighted in having it so. The spirit of unselfishness must be present in the heart and life of a true pastor, whether he is supported by his church or by his own hands. (vs. 31, 33-35.)

IV.—PARTING BENEDICTION.

When our Lord parted with his disciples on the night before his crucifixion, he commended them to God. This he did in prayer which he uttered in their amazed and fascinated hearing. (John xvii.) So now Paul, in imitation of, or rather following, the Lord's example, commends these elders to God. He had in a measure taken care of them as well as of the church, but now he hands them over to God—not, indeed, to free them from the care of themselves and the flock, but in order that they may know the true source of strength and comfort.

1. Commended to God.—"I commend you to God." He recommended them to look to God with confidence and hope. He would have them remember that God loved them; that he was present always by his Spirit to help them; that he had all wisdom to guide them, and all-loving and tender mercy to sympathize with them, and a perfect knowledge of both themselves and all their surroundings, so that he could at all times be direct help to them in their time of need.

2. "The word of his grace."—Paul had already spoken to them of the "Gospel of the grace of God" (v. 24), so now again he calls their attention to that word. With Paul the word of God was little short of being one with God. That word reveals to us the heart of God and opens up to us all his secrets and purposes. If we are to fulfill our mission as teachers or are to take heed to ourselves, we must be intimately acquainted with the word of God. It is a word of grace always. God has no word for man that does not directly or indirectly mean grace for us. That word is not a "word only." It "is able." The word of God's grace has in it the strength and power of God himself. When Jesus spake to the sick and the lame, and even the dead, his word drove out the sickness, restored wasted faculties, and even commanded the powers of the other world to deliver up from death the souls of the departed. That same word written for us is as able as when it was spoken by Jesus himself. (i) It "is able to build you up." However weak one may be,

either in knowledge or spiritual strength, the word of the grace of God, carefully studied and loyally attended to, will build up the soul, and make it strong in faith and in wisdom. (ii) It is able "to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." This is a double inheritance. First, it covers the inheritance which sanctified souls on earth have in fellowship and communion with God. It includes "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of "our" understanding being enlightened; that" we "may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." (Eph. i, 17, 18.) Second, it is a title-deed to the inheritance of the saints in the world to come. That "inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (I. Pet. i, 4, 5.) Such was Paul's parting benediction and prayer for the Ephesians, and such is God's desire for us all too, for what was spoken for them has been preserved to us by the Holy Spirit, and still is spoken for our benefit. The word of God is never old and never loses its power, because it is the word of the Living God and not the word of man. May we faithfully attend to it.

XXXIII.

PAUL AT JERUSALEM.—Acts xxi, 27-39.

(27) And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, (28) Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (29) (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) (30) And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. (31) And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar: (32) Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. (33) Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. (34) And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. (35) And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. (36) For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him. (37) And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? (38) Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? (39) But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.—Acts xxi, 27-39.

The events in the history of the apostolic ministry of Paul are now transferred from Asia Minor and Greece to Jerusalem, where for the third time Paul has gone. He went this time with his personal company, including Luke, certain disciples from Cesarea, an old disciple from Cyprus named Mnason, and Trophimus, an Ephesian Greek. We are not clearly informed just what was the object of this visit. That Paul went against the counsel of certain Christian prophets is clear. His purpose was a strong one, but it does not appear that he accomplished anything by the visit. God indeed overruled it for good, and it was the means of sending him to Rome by the way of Cesarea again. Paul had a passionate love for Jerusalem, and though he was commissioned to the Gentiles he always

longed to preach the Gospel to the Jews, and especially to the Jerusalem Jews, among whom he had spent his life and with whom (the rulers) he had been associated in their opposition and persecution of "that Way." At any rate, we find Paul with his personal company again in the city. He immediately made known his arrival to the brethren there, who received him and his friends gladly. (v. 17.) Paul was by this time well known in Jerusalem, not because he had been there frequently, but he had been there on two important occasions before, and the success of his ministry among the Gentiles was being constantly reported to the church at Jerusalem. The day after their arrival he went with his friends to the house of James, the chief pastor of the church and the Lord's half-brother, who was assembled with the elders, and detailed to them all the things which God had been working among the Gentiles. At this good news they "glorified the Lord." No doubt their thanksgiving was genuine, but their gladness was a little damped and their enthusiasm a little chilled because of a great big BUT which they interposed. They would doubtless have been quite as happy to have heard this good news by letter as to have had it brought to them personally by Paul. "Thou seest, brother." This was the embarrassment. That is, "Your presence in the city will excite a great deal of bad feeling among the Jewish believers here." There were many thousands of Jews, and they were all zealous of the law. That is, they were believers in Christ, but they had never as yet disposed of their old Jewish grave-clothes. Called into Gospel light and life by the word of the Gospel, they had risen out of the old Jewish ceremonial grave, but still clutched the cerements of that dead ceremonial to their Christian bodies, and were angry with Paul because he had thrown these off and was standing in the "liberty wherewith Christ had made him free." Exaggerated reports of Paul's teaching among the Gentiles had come to Jerusalem and had still further deeply prejudiced the people against him. They had heard that Paul not only taught the Gentiles that they were not bound by the ceremonial law of Moses, but that even the Jews were no longer to circumcise their children, nor were they to observe any of the old Jewish rites. This was not true, for Paul himself had caused Titus to be circumcised because one of his parents was a Jew. He did, indeed, teach that circumcision availed nothing to justify a man, especially to the Gentiles, but rather put him under legal obligations which had been abrogated by the Gospel. Yet he was ever content to allow Jews to indulge their prejudices so far as they did not tend to the denial of the all-sufficiency of the redemption in Christ. (Gal. v, 3.) James

told Paul that his presence in the city would be certainly known by the Jewish believers, and they would undoubtedly demand some explanations and enter some protests against his being received. James therefore proposed a very "inexpedient expedient" to Paul, viz. : that, as there were then in the city certain Jews who had a vow upon them, Paul should join them in the ceremonial purification incident upon the sacrifices offered on such an occasion, and be at the expense of the whole matter, especially to show himself in the Temple with these orthodox Jews, and thus by his presence and participation in Jewish and Temple ceremonial directly contradict the false rumors. It strikes us that this was rather a cowardly proposition on the part of James and the elders. We wonder why they did not boldly stand by Paul and champion him in the face of the prejudiced church. They had position and authority. Paul was their honored guest, and they knew his practices and approved them. Why, then, leave him in the lurch and put the whole onus of the matter on him? We can conceive no reason other than the one found in indisposition to be troubled with other people's matters or be embarrassed by one's friends. I can well fancy Paul swallowing some mouthfuls of indignation at the cold shoulder the Jerusalem brethren gave him in this matter, especially after all he had done for them. His own action was in strong contrast with theirs. Humble to a degree (though it is certain that Paul's spirit revolted at this makeshift method), he nevertheless submitted and even cheerfully undertook to do a thing which was a little humiliating, in order to disabuse the prejudices of his Jewish brethren, whom he tenderly loved. This is another instance of Paul's well-known rule of being all things to all men in order that he might win some. There was nothing wrong in what he did; he was in no sense playing the hypocrite; that he would not have done under any circumstances anything which violated his conscience goes without saying. This also he did for the Gospel's sake. We admire Paul's humility and willingness to sacrifice himself in this matter all the more because it was done in the face of what seems to me to be an ungenerous and rather cowardly part played by James and the elders: a truckling to prejudices which they should have boldly faced and put down by their authority, or at least bravely met standing by the servant of God, in whose integrity they had absolute confidence. More than one servant of God has had occasion to echo the sentiment of somebody who exclaimed: "Save me from my friends, and I will be able to manage my enemies."

I.—THE JEWISH MOB.

If there was anything needed to show how foolish and unwise was the shuffling advice given to the Apostle in the matter of going through a vain ceremonial in the Temple to assuage the prejudices of Jewish believers, the result of this miserable business demonstrated it. Paul in jumping out of the frying-pan of Christian-Jewish prejudice jumped into the fire of unbelieving-Jewish fanaticism and hatred. James sent him into the Temple to prove to the believing Jews that he was not antagonistic to the Mosaic ritual or Jewish customs; his being there, instead of proving the desired point to the *believing* Jews, was taken as positive proof of profanation to the *unbelieving* Jews. His good was immediately evil spoken of. The scheme was intended to placate believers, and it ended in arousing the wild fury of unbelievers. Thus do makeshift expedients usually turn out. At the close of the seven days required for the ceremony of purification (v. 27) the trouble began.

1. Paul's enemies.—These were some Asiatic Jews, either from Ephesus or its immediate vicinity, who had come up to the feast. They knew Paul by sight, perhaps were the very ringleaders of that part of the Ephesian synagogue who had hardened their hearts against the Gospel and manifested their personal hatred of Paul. Paul had been too conspicuous and bold a preacher not to be a well-known man. Seeing him one day in the Temple, they at once came to the conclusion, or assumed to do so, that he was there for the purpose of dishonoring it. "A man's foes are often they of his own household." This was pre-eminently so with Jesus. "His own received him not." One of his own disciples betrayed him, and his own countrymen murdered him, even when the Roman governor would have saved him. Paul is now walking in the footsteps of his Master and tasting again at Jerusalem a draught of that bitterness and hatred with which he had become familiar in Asia Minor and at Thessalonica. But these things did not move him.

2. The charge against Paul.—These Asiatic Jews in their fanatical appeal to the people charged Paul with four things: (i) That he taught all "men everywhere against the people." That is, that he was a renegade from his own people, that in Asia and Europe he had been carrying on an active campaign against the Jews, though he was himself a Jew. Never was there a falser charge than this. Never, in his most earnest presentations of the Gospel, or in his closest arguments to prove that Jesus was the Christ, did Paul

speaking a word against the Jewish people. His greatest passion was that of love for them next to his love for Christ. He never ceased to try and win them to the faith. His "prayer to God for Israel was that they might be saved." But this charge was brought against him, and it had great weight with the people, already smarting under a thousand slanders reported and circulated against them by their Roman conquerors. (ii) That he spoke against the law. This also was false, for Paul honored the law of Moses. He indeed pointed out how it could not save the sinner, and how it had been fulfilled in the one sacrifice of Christ, but he never spoke against it. His whole life from his youth up had been guided by that law, and even when he gave up seeking righteousness by the law to find it in Christ through faith, he still held the law in the highest reverence as the revealer of sin and the outward expression of God's inherent righteousness. (iii) That he spoke against the Temple. This was equally false. The Temple was a revered spot and building to Paul. Every early and holy association of his life was associated with it. It is true that he pointed out that the Temple had fulfilled its divine purpose and now found its anti-type in Christ, who is the true Temple and meeting-place of God with his people. These charges were of the same nature as those which thirty years before had been laid against Jesus himself. "The servant is not greater than his Master," and since they falsified him, Paul could expect no better treatment for himself at their hands. (iv) That he had purposely and deliberately defiled the Temple by bringing a Greek into its inner courts. They had seen Trophimus with Paul in the streets, and because Paul was now seen in the Temple in company with others they leaped to the conclusion, or assumed to do so, that he was defiling it by bringing in a Greek, or, as they would term it, "a Gentile dog." This, of course, was utterly false; but that was not the point with these haters of Christ and his servant. These Jews never allowed the truth to stand in the way of their purpose. They lied about Christ, trumped up false charges against him, and made false issues before Pilate; so now they do likewise with Paul.

3. The rallying-cry of hatred.—"Men of Israel, help." They thus cried out, rehearsing these charges, and appealing to the patriotism and fanatical zeal of the Jews against a man whom they designated as a double enemy. The spark took hold of the people, and in a few moments the whole city was in a blaze of wild excitement, the likelihood being that not one out of a hundred of the mob knew what had brought them together, as is evidenced by the confused accounts they gave of the matter to the Roman captain.

“Some cried one thing, some another.” This illustrated the absolute necessity of government. The fury of a mob blinded by prejudice and passion never yet did an act of justice.

4. Paul seized and dragged out of the Temple.—The mob rushed into the Temple, and without stopping to inquire why Paul was there, who were his companions, and whether the charges alleged against him were true, dragged him out, as he had once helped to drag Stephen out. He must have thought of that event as he found himself in the chief place in a similar transaction. Then he was the director and leader of a mob; now he was its victim, and he was about to suffer the same fate that thirty years ago he had meted out to Stephen. “And forthwith the doors were shut.” This is suggestive. The intention of the leaders of the mob was to kill Paul; but to have slain him in the Temple would have been to defile it. They were too religious to do that; so they dragged him out and shut the doors. To “strain at a gnat and swallow a camel” was no new thing for the Jews to do. They scrupled to defile the Temple with blood, but did not hesitate for an instant to murder an innocent man. We have heard of murderers who confessed to eating meat on Friday and got absolution for that heinous offense, but did not think it worth while to confess that they had murdered the man whose lunch they had eaten on the same day. What strange and devilish inconsistencies have been done in the name of religion, what horrible crimes committed! But if the Jews from envy murdered the Son of God, we could not expect them to hesitate to do the same thing to one of his disciples.

II.—THE INTERVENTION OF THE ROMAN.

The news of this uproar in the streets got to the ear of the captain of the Temple guard, and he immediately came down with soldiers just in time to rescue Paul from his intended murderers. At sight of the soldiers the Jews “left beating of Paul.” Here, again, we have an illustration of the value of government, and its protection to life as well as to property. God has ordained the magistrate to keep the peace among men, to protect the innocent and to punish the evil-doer. This was a heathen government, this Roman government, but in this case, at least, it was used by God to protect and save his servant. The Roman captain did not extend his protection to Paul because he cared for him or knew anything about him, but simply because it was his duty to keep the peace in that turbulent city. This is now the third time that Paul’s life had been saved by

the intervention of the Roman power, not because of favor to him, but simply in discharge of the duty of government to the whole community. Once at Corinth, where Gallio stood between him and the Jews; once in Ephesus, where the town clerk interposed in the interests of the city's peace; and now at Jerusalem. It is not necessary that there should be any formal alliance between Church and State. Indeed, that is always a misfortune and calamity to the Church, and in violation of the fundamental principle of the Christian commonwealth. God is able to overrule the governing powers of this world when it is necessary for him to do so in the interests of religion, without the Church making any alliance with them.

1. Paul bound with two chains.—When the soldiers got Paul out of the hands of the mob and into their hands, he was by command of the captain manacled between two soldiers, his right and left hands bound to the right and left hand of either soldier. This was not the first experience Paul had had with fetters, nor was it to be the last. He must have remembered now the prophecy of Agabus. (v. 11.) It is true that he was bound by the Romans and not by the Jews, but it was through them that these chains were on his hands. The captain assumed that Paul was some criminal, though he could get at no information on the subject from the crowd. This also is after the manner of the law sometimes, and especially after the manner of the policeman. I read the other day of a policeman who came running up to where there was a disturbance and fight between two men. He asked which of the two men had gotten the worst of the fight, and when the weaker party was pointed out to him he promptly arrested that one and marched him off to prison. A party of salvationists are parading the streets and singing their hymns, when a lot of roughs set upon them and stone them. Then the police rush in and arrest the salvationists and march them off to jail on charge of breaking the peace.

2. Paul in the castle prison.—Again a prisoner. Philippi is repeated at Jerusalem! Jew and Gentile are alike at heart when the Lord of life is absent. No doubt the barracks where Paul was carried were the best and safest place for him, but no particular thanks were due to the captain of the band. Prisons are not the worst places that God's people have been compelled to inhabit. Peter, I think, never regretted his prison experience when he remembered the visit of the angel who released him. Paul never regretted his prison at Philippi when he remembered the earthquake and the conversion of the jailer and his household. Nor did he regret his longer residence in the prison at Rome when he remembered

Onesimus and the loving care of his beloved Philippians. Certainly the Church at large has only to thank God for what has come out of prisons where his saints have been confined. The Epistles of Paul were some of them written from his prison. The Revelation of John was given to him when he was a prisoner either in the mines or the galleys. Luther's Bible was largely translated while the great reformer was a practical prisoner. John Bunyan's immortal "Pilgrim's Progress" was conceived and written in Bedford jail. Surely God knows how to turn prisons to good account! It was well for Paul now that he was fast chained to the two soldiers, for the press of the hungry mob was so great that they would have torn him out of the soldiers' hands but that he had been bound to them. As it was, they literally carried him up the stairs into a place of safety. These were strange angels, but God had given them charge over his saint, and they bore him up on their hands, lest the wolves should have devoured him. Well, well, we will not quarrel with the rough usage of the world when God is superintending the business.

III.—THE FORTITUDE OF THE APOSTLE.

As soon as Paul was well up the stairs and out of reach of the mob he turned to the captain and asked the privilege of speaking to him.

1. "**May I speak unto thee?**"—It was a wonder that Paul had either breath in his body or wits about him to speak at all after all the rough handling he had had. But the greater wonder is that his thought all the time was for his countrymen, who were even then thirsting for his blood. It was no petition for himself or explanation of his position which animated him. He wanted speech with the captain only that he might have speech with his countrymen. Speaking in Greek, he surprised the captain, who asked him if he was not that Egyptian (a certain mad fanatic) who recently had led a huge insurrection of more than four thousand men, which was subsequently put down, although the leader escaped. This captain now assumed that Paul could be no other than he. Officers of government are not supposed to know who preachers of the Gospel are, and are not as a rule slow to assume that they are "some Egyptian or another," who ought to be imprisoned or put down.

2. "**A citizen of no mean city.**"—Paul quickly disabused the mind of the bluff but ignorant soldier by informing him that he was not only not the Egyptian in question, but was both a Jew and a

free Roman citizen. He had therefore a double right to be heard, and he was then allowed to speak.

3. **“I beseech thee, suffer me to speak.”**—This time to speak to the people. All we have to ask of government is freedom to speak to the people. Paul longed not to justify himself but to show the people, who were thirsting for his life, the way of salvation. What a great tender heart there was in that man! No resentment, no bitterness; but only yearning love for them. He “counted not his life dear to himself,” but would have died for the Lord Jesus Christ there if he could thereby have won his people to the knowledge of him. He who “could wish himself accursed from Christ for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. ix, 3) could not now indulge in resentment. He was a worthy follower of the Lord who said on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

XXXIV.

PAUL BEFORE FELIX.—Acts xxiv, 10–25.

(10) Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: (11) Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. (12) And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: (13) Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. (14) But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: (15) And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. (16) And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. (17) Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. (18) Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. (19) Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had aught against me. (20) Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, (21) Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day. (22) And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. (23) And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him. (24) And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. (25) And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.—Acts xxiv, 10–25.

In our last study we left Paul standing on the platform of the stairway which led up from the Temple into the castle barracks. He had sought and obtained permission to speak to the Jews, which he did, using the Hebrew tongue. This at first flattered, or at least pleased, the people, who were fanatically attached to everything Jewish. He had not finished the detailed account of his conversion and set forth his commission from Christ to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, when the wild passion of the mob broke out afresh, and with one voice they cried out, "Away with such a fellow from the

earth," and, rushing upon him, would have torn him from the soldiers but that the captain hurried him inside the castle. The next day the chief captain summoned the Sanhedrim together and brought Paul down to them, in order to find out the truth of the charge brought against him. In the meantime the captain had learned that his prisoner was a Roman citizen, which naturally put Paul on favorable grounds with the Roman authorities. Paul was scarcely before the Sanhedrim, and had uttered but one brief sentence, when the high-priest commanded him "to be smitten in the mouth." This Paul resented with bitter words, though he afterward apologized for his rudeness to the high-priest, notwithstanding he had strong provocation. The counsel was a failure, because the Jews were like a company of wild beasts who simply sought to tear Paul to pieces. The captain, to save Paul's life, took him back to the barracks. Then a cabal was formed, bound by an oath in which the conspirators swore that they would neither eat nor drink till they had assassinated Paul. This plot coming to the ears of the centurion, he hurried Paul off to Cesarea, to Felix, the governor of the province, with a letter briefly detailing the circumstances under which Paul was arrested. After five days Ananias the high-priest, with a hired orator or pleader, came down to Cesarea to indict Paul, and, if possible, to get a conviction from Felix, who was known to be amenable to other arguments than those of the law and the testimony. They brought neither witnesses nor personal accusers. They relied upon a bold accusation without proof, and—Felix. After Tertullus had concluded his speech, which was full of fulsome and hypocritical flattery of Felix and gross and lying slanders against Paul, Felix beckoned to Paul with cold and haughty Roman condescension, intimating that he might speak in his own defense.

I.—PAUL AT THE BAR OF ROME.

Before turning our attention to Paul's defense, it may be well for us to make the acquaintance of Felix. He was the most notoriously unprincipled governor in the entire dominions of Rome. Originally a slave, he had succeeded in obtaining his freedom, and by genius and great strength of will had attained to the highest position of trust and honor in the Roman government. He was the personal favorite of the emperor. He was vastly rich, having obtained his wealth by fraud and all practices of dishonesty, especially by receiving large bribes from interested parties in return for his favorable decisions in cases coming before him. He was relentlessly

cruel and unscrupulous, having brought about at one time the assassination of the high-priest of Jerusalem to gratify personal pique and obtain selfish ends. He was a slave to the lowest passions, and unprincipled in all his methods of gratifying them. His present wife was the wife of a petty king, whom he had enticed away from her husband by the help of an astrologer. He is said to have had all the imperiousness of a king coupled with all the meanness of a slave.

1. Paul accused.—This was the man before whom Paul was brought for trial. His accuser, the hired attorney, charged him with being four things: (i) A pestilent fellow. (ii) A mover of sedition among the Jews throughout the world. (iii) A ringleader among the sect of the Nazarenes. (iv) A profaner of the Temple. Every one of them lies except the last, which had a half truth in it, and was therefore the worst lie of them all. What an outrageous charge this was against Paul, let every line in his heroic, self-sacrificing, big, and tender-hearted life refute. But the Jews were never careful of the truth when they had a point to make against Christ or his followers. How would Paul meet these charges? Look at him! An old man before his time; his body all worn and marred with violence, beatings, and chains which he had suffered; his face wrinkled with the hardships through which he had passed; his eyes weak through disease; his hair white prematurely. Look at the man as he stands there, full of gentle dignity, and his eyes, though weak in their setting, full of spirit and fire, burning with the steady light of honest indignation and conscious integrity. I can fancy his spare figure, at best of small stature, towering in dignity, and, in spite of the many beatings and much ill-usage he had suffered, holding itself with the grace and courtesy which his innate gentlemanliness gave to it.

2. His address to Felix.—Tertullus had addressed Felix with fulsome words of flattery which both he and the governor knew to be false and hypocritical; but it was his method of procedure to flatter the bribe-taker and curry favor with the man by tickling his vanity on those very points where he knew himself to be the weakest in character. Good deeds, clemency, provident care, and nobility were personal qualities which would blush to be found in the presence of this monster of cruelty, injustice, heartlessness, and dishonesty. If Tertullus was a flatterer, was not Paul one also? Did he not address the governor in terms of extreme courtesy? Yes, he did that, for Paul, though not a pleader in the technical sense, was at least and always a gentleman. There was but one point to which

Paul could allude without being either a flatterer or a sycophant. Felix had for a comparatively long time been the governor of the province. He at least knew the Roman law, which was just, and the manners, customs, and general doctrines of the Jews, both from personal study, and because of his present wife, who was a Jewess. Besides, he was the authorized governor or ruler of the people, and as such, for the sake of his office (if not for his character), was entitled to respect. So far Paul went, and no farther. The contrast between the flattery of Tertullus and the courteous but reserved address of Paul must have struck Felix, and though he might not have liked it, could not, even with his deadened manhood, but respect the man who could thus speak.

3. His general denial.—Paul said that he cheerfully answered for himself. He had nothing to be ashamed of. He had no witnesses to produce, but he did enter a dignified denial to all the charges alleged against him, and appealed to the governor's sense of right and the logic of things to support his denials against the grossly false charges brought against him. Innocence and truth are the best defense which a man can have. Thus armed, it is not necessary to resort to any special pleading. It is not always that an innocent man can make his innocence appear, nor a truthful man bring forth his truth so that men will acknowledge it; yet they are still a man's best defense, and as a rule are mighty and will prevail. The defense of Paul was, besides, a most skillful one, and showed that he knew well how to present his case. (i) There was the element of time. There had been but twelve days since he entered Jerusalem. How had they been spent? The first day was spent with James and the elders. The next seven days were spent in performing an orthodox religious rite in the Temple. The next day he was under arrest, appeared before the Sanhedrim in the custody of the chief captain, and the next five days had been spent in imprisonment in Cesarea. Here are fourteen days in all, or twelve days exclusive of the day of his arrival in Jerusalem and the present day in which he now stood before the governor. Now, how could he have had time to stir up strife and sedition in the city? His time had been fully accounted for. As to being a "pestilent fellow," that was a general charge against his character, which had nothing to do with actions, and which counted for nothing except a bitter word used to prejudice him before his judge, but for which there was not the slightest proof. As for being a defiler of the Temple, he had spent seven of his days in the Temple, actually performing in a reverent manner and paying the proper charges for an orthodox rite. He

was honoring both the law of Moses and the Temple. The governor must see for himself that these charges were utterly groundless. No man had seen him in the Temple, nor in the synagogue, nor in the street, arguing with, much less stirring up, the people. (ii) He accounts for his presence in Jerusalem. Being a devout lover of his nation, though a Nazarene, he had come up to Jerusalem with the express purpose of worshiping, that is, of being present at the feast of Pentecost and participating in the general gladness of that day. How could he, then, be charged with profaning the Temple? Moreover, as has already been pointed out, he had been for days engaged in actual ceremonial worship according to the law of Moses and the usages of the Temple. Besides this he had come with the specific intention and for the express purpose of bringing a large alms which he had collected for the poor and distressed believers in Jerusalem from the richer churches in Asia and Europe. How was this consistent with the charge of sedition, desecration, and hatred of the people? (iii) He challenges proof of any and all of the charges made against him. As a matter of fact, the real breeders of the disturbance and instigators of the arrest were certain Asiatic Jews, who, strange to say, were not present to substantiate any charges which they had to make, or to justify their proceedings in exciting the mob, which had already beaten and maltreated him. As for the Jews who were now persecuting him, he challenged them to testify to any single act of which he had been guilty which would support the charges they had that day made against him. Thus did Paul nobly and fearlessly defend himself and put his accusers to shame before the governor from whom they had hoped to gain an easy verdict.

4. A noble confession.—There was one charge to which he paid particular attention. He was charged with being the ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. This charge was made in the form and spirit that was intended to convey the idea that he was an apostate Jew, and that the sect of the Nazarenes (or followers of Jesus) were a pestilent company whose business was to work schism and breed dissension among the Jews, and thus foment sedition generally. There was just a grain of truth in this charge. That is, he was a disciple of "the Nazarene." That he was a ringleader or a leader he would be proud to own, if the sense were a just one. This much, at any rate, he would confess, and let the Jews and Felix make the best or the worst of it. (i) Christianity, or faith in Christ, is no heresy. They called him a heretic, and the Gospel he preached a heresy. But he affirmed that, though a follower of Christ, he was

no heretic; for the following of Christ involved the worship of God according to all things which are written in the law and the prophets. He worshiped no new God, but the God of his fathers, and entertained no new doctrines, or no doctrines contrary to those of the law and the prophets. Here we have a grand statement of the real unity of the Old and New Testament religions. There are not two, but one faith. Christianity is not opposed to the law or the prophets, but is the flower and fruit of them both, in doctrine, in fact, in life, and in practice. (ii) He declares his hope. "And have hope toward God." This hope in and toward God is based on a faith and expectation which the leading sect of the Jews, the Pharisees, also allow, viz.: that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and the unjust. The resurrection of Christ is the central and fundamental fact in the Christian faith. This is not a new doctrine. Life and immortality were affirmed in connection with the resurrection, by Job, by David, by Daniel, and other of the Old Testament prophets. It is true that it was only fully *brought to light* by the Gospel; but just as the ripe fruit on the tree is not other than a part of the tree in which it was hidden and in whose bud and blossoms it was promised, so the resurrection of Christ, which is the foundation of our hope in God, is a part of the Mosaic and prophetic teaching of the Scriptures. (Rom. i, 1-4; I. Cor. xv, 1-4; I. Pet. i, 21; II. Tim. i, 9, 10.) The only thing of all that might be alleged against Paul in all his public ministry, either in Jerusalem or abroad, which they might denominate heresy, was his faith and hope in God based on the resurrection: "Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them" (on the steps of the castle): "Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day." (vs. 14, 15, 16, 21.) This charge he freely confessed and was proud to acknowledge. If this was heresy, then he was prepared to stand by it and if need be to follow his Master to death for it. But in that case let his accusers know that in condemning him they denied their own Scriptures and destroyed the hope which they as a nation had, even as their fathers nearly thirty years before had murdered their hopes when they delivered Jesus up to be crucified.

5. A good conscience.—In the twenty-third chapter, at the first verse, Paul declared to his countrymen to whom he was about to speak: "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." Now before this conscienceless governor he exalts the conscience, and declares that it is a matter in which he exercises himself to have it always void of offense. The conscience in itself is not a sufficient guide for man, but when properly instructed and

duly exercised it becomes the very voice of God to the soul. It is at least the ear of the soul through which God speaks. At first the connection between conscience and the matter of Paul's discourse does not appear; but a little attention will show it. Religion is the sum of the soul's activity toward God and man. Conscience is the monitor of the soul, but behind and beyond the conscience is God. God is known to us through the Scriptures of revelation, and the conscience is purged, purified, and made a fit and perfect instrument by the atonement of Jesus, which has redeemed and purged it and brought it over to God's side. (Heb. x, 22; I. Pet. i, 15, 16, 21.) Belief in the Scriptures and hope toward God through the resurrection (vs. 14, 15) are the two great teachers and keepers of the conscience. But conscience must be exercised. A theoretical code of life toward God and man will not do, neither will conscience be able to carry a man through the great or even the small crises of life, unless it is constantly *exercised*. The exercise of the conscience is a matter which every Christian should daily attend to.

6. The case postponed.—Felix, who had a "more perfect knowledge of that way,"—that is, he understood the whole controversy between the Jews and the Christians, and was intimate with all the facts concerning Jesus Christ, "the Way,"—saw the absurdity of the charges which the Jews brought against Paul, and the soundness of his defense, and practically acquitted Paul, though he did not release him. On the other hand, he simply adjourned the case on the technical plea that he must wait for Lysias, the chief captain, to come down and give his version of the case, as there were no witnesses produced either for or against the prisoner. The real reason for the suspended verdict of acquittal was that Felix entertained the hope that either Paul or his friends would offer him a large sum of money for his release. (v. 26.) His favor was intimated in the large courtesies and liberty he allowed him in his imprisonment. (v. 23.) For two years this crafty, avaricious governor kept Paul, nor ever attempted to make any further inquiry into his case.

II.—FELIX BEFORE PAUL.

There are some strange reversals of positions in the tragedy of Christianity in conflict with the wickedness of this world. No one can read either the story of Christ before Pilate or Paul before Felix without saying as a matter of fact in both cases it is the judge who is under trial before the prisoner.

1. A private sermon to a small audience.—After some days

of absence from Cesarea, Felix returned, and at the instance of Drusilla, his Jewish wife (the daughter of Agrippa I., who had caused James to be beheaded, and who was herself the lawful wife of Aziz the King of Amesa, but whom Felix had enticed away to himself), sent for Paul to hear what he might have to say concerning the faith of Christ. This was a small company, but Paul would not shrink from all endeavors to win their souls, though he knew their wickedness. He would not avail himself of the opportunity it afforded him of pleading his own cause or of compounding for his liberty by the payment of money. He saw his opportunity and promptly embraced it. Neither did he shun to "declare . . . all the counsel of God" to these two almost royal sinners. It has been said that Paul did not preach the Gospel to them on this occasion; that his sermon was a mere moral essay. Well, Paul could not have preached this sermon without reference to Jesus Christ, and he is the Gospel; but he presented the truth that these two sinners most needed. It is of no use preaching forgiveness of sins to men who have no consciousness of sin. Paul sought to arouse their consciences. He at least caused Felix to tremble. That sermons on morality be preached, will never be objected to, if they only prick the conscience and cause the sinners who hear them to tremble. Paul had three heads to this sermon.

(i) *Temperance.* By that he did not mean total abstinence from the use of wine and strong drink, though he might have preached such a sermon to them and have done well. But the temperance which he preached was that law of self-restraint and self-government which is the final proof of a new life in God, and which had never been once in his life exercised by Felix. Whatever he wanted he took. If he wanted money, he got it by fair means or by foul. If a high-priest was in his way, he would have him assassinated if he did not die soon enough of his own accord. If he wanted another man's wife, he took her. He was a man of unbridled passion and limitless self-indulgence. Against these Paul preached.

(ii) *Righteousness.* That is, that course of life which recognizes the right which God has in us both to obedience and service, and which our neighbor has in us because we are both God's creatures and the subjects of his moral government. Indeed, the righteousness which Paul preached to Felix was that line of conscientious conduct toward God and man which Paul in all good endeavor and truth exercised himself.

(iii) *Judgment to come.* Here he clearly pointed out to Felix that God would certainly bring every work of man into judgment, and that he had appointed a day in which he would judge the world by

Jesus Christ, whereof he had given the world witness and warning by raising him from the dead. (Acts xvii, 30, 31.) There was a good deal of Gospel preaching in this "moral sermon" of Paul's. The effect of it upon the conscience of Felix was marked. He came to hear something which would entertain him and gratify his curiosity, but he heard something he did not care to hear, and which made him uncomfortable for at least a time. We cannot sufficiently admire the boldness, the faithfulness, and the great-hearted unselfishness of the noble Apostle when we consider both the circumstances under which he preached that sermon and the truths which he delivered. Would we were all likewise faithful both to the truth and to our opportunities!

2. Felix strangles his conscience.—It would seem that the Holy Spirit working with the word had convinced Felix "of sin and of righteousness and of judgment," and that his conscience was fairly reached. But it did not suit Felix to give up his sins, any more than it did Herod to give up his brother Philip's wife at the bidding of John the Baptist, or Pilate to obey his convictions of duty and to free Jesus at the hazard of losing favor with Rome at the instigation of the Jews, or the young ruler to sell all that he had and follow Christ when he was challenged as to the measure of his interest in the possession of eternal life. So he did the only other thing which is left to a crafty and insincere man. He did not drive Paul from his presence as Pharaoh did Moses, nor behead him as Herod did Pilate or as Agrippa did James; he just shook himself free from the present thrall of the Apostle's word, and said for a makeshift, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." That season never came to Felix. Perhaps he did not want it to come. Let us, however, forget Felix for a moment and look at the peril of adopting this popular and common plea of procrastination in the face of the urgency of the Gospel. (i) To postpone attention to God's command is folly, for no man knows that he has another day or season at his disposal. (ii) It is presumption, for it implies a deliberate intention to live still longer in sin, supposing that God will compound that felony. (iii) It is dangerous, for no man knows to what extent he will become entangled hopelessly in sin before he finds it convenient to turn to the Lord. (iv) It is suicidal, because the habit of postponement, or unbelief, steadily deadens the power of faith, and leads to the final hardening of the heart. (v) It is presumptuous, because it assumes that salvation is a pure matter of the individual will, and not of the sovereign grace of God, who calls us to it.

XXXV.

PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA.—Acts xxvi, 19-32.

(19) Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: (20) But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. (21) For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. (22) Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: (23) That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. (24) And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. (25) But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. (26) For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. (27) King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. (28) Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. (29) And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds. (30) And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: (31) And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. (32) Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cesar.—Acts xxvi, 19-32.

For two long years Paul had been kept a close prisoner by Felix at Cesarea. No further attempt had been made by the Jews to get possession of him. The chief captain never came down to give any detailed account of the matter. Felix trembled at his last interview with Paul when he heard of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. Why did not Felix release Paul, whom he knew to be innocent? First, because he hoped to get some money for doing so, either from Paul or his friends. But Paul was not a man who would buy himself out of prison. He would have an honorable acquittal or none. (xvi, 37.) This attitude of Paul probably piqued Felix, and he simply left Paul in prison out of sheer wantonness. It does not appear that Paul suffered from his confinement, for though it was close it was not rigorous. He had his books (as we learn from our present study), and full permission was given to his

friends to visit him. (xxiv, 23.) It is strange that there should be no account of this long imprisonment that dropped out two years of that marvelously active life. But God saw, no doubt, that he needed the rest and recuperation of his physical strength for what was yet before him: shipwreck, chains, prison at Rome, and finally death.

At the end of two years Felix was superseded in his office by Festus, who seems to have been a much better type of man, indeed, a worthy Roman; even Paul addressed him as "most noble Festus," and he was no court flatterer. If Paul called him noble, he was noble. After arriving on the coast he almost immediately went up to Jerusalem to confer with the political and religious leaders of the Jews and thus get his bearings before entering upon the practical discharge of his duties. The Jews at once importuned him to deliver Paul up to them to be tried by their law, but really that they might have opportunity to assassinate him. It is to be hoped that those Jews who vowed two years ago that they would not eat or drink until they had killed Paul had kept their vow and were comfortably starved to death! Festus would not consent to the proposition, though he would have been glad to have begun his reign by showing them a favor. He bade them come down if they had anything to offer, and he would give them an immediate hearing. They followed the governor to Cesarea, and again Paul was brought before the judgment bar, and for a third time repeated his defense, and for a third time convinced the authorities that there was no wrong in him; yet he was made a sport and political scapegoat, so that to save himself from being delivered over to the Jews he appealed to Cæsar. A few days after, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice paid a visit of ceremony to Festus, who among other things told the king of Paul's case, asking his advice, and proposing that they should hear him, so that he might with the aid of Agrippa's counsel know what to write to the emperor about him, since he had appealed his case to Rome. This brought Paul again to the court, but this time to a private and informal hearing, rather to give an account of his doctrine concerning Jesus Christ. Festus and his royal guests were his auditors. He began his address by setting before them the manner of his life as a Jew before his conversion, his activity in persecuting Christians, and finally for the second time he gives in detail the story of his conversion and the commission which he received from the Lord Jesus to preach the Gospel among the Gentiles. In the three accounts we have of the conversion of Paul—one related by Luke (doubtless as he had received it privately from Paul), and twice related by Paul himself (once as he stood on the

castle steps to the Jews, and now before Festus and Agrippa)—we have a pretty sure guaranty that the facts related were those of truth and soberness and not of mere delusion, much less of fraud or fiction.

I.—THE HEAVENLY VISION.

Paul said, after detailing what he saw and heard in connection with his meeting with Jesus, that he was not “disobedient unto the heavenly vision.” The whole tone of this remarkable address is one of suppressed joy and gladness. After nearly thirty years, the facts connected with his conversion come back to him freighted with such gladness that his whole being is awakened into a sublime enthusiasm, and he delights in telling the story and taking opportunity of pressing life and salvation upon his hearers.

1. Paul's obedience.—“Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.” Every conversion is the result of a spiritual vision of heavenly things. All of us have not had the exact experience of Paul in this respect, but we have all had a vision of the same Christ and of the will of God concerning us. We do not need the actual vision of Christ now, since we have the completed record to guide us, and the power of faith to bring unseen things within the range of our minds and souls and to render them into substantial realities. We learn also from Paul's declaration that it is possible, even with such a revelation as he had, to be disobedient to it. Many a man has been clearly convinced of the truth by the power of the word and the Spirit, as Paul was by the actual vision of Christ, and has turned away in disobedience, even as Felix did, as Agrippa was about to do. Faith is not simply believing a thing to be true, but it is so believing that it starts the soul into action toward the thing believed, if it is in itself calculated to move the soul. In the case of the Gospel, faith is the obedience of the whole man to the word of God, the soul submitting itself meantime to Christ. In Paul's case, his obedience was seen in his prompt acceptance of Jesus as his Saviour and Lord, and his equally prompt acceptance of the commission he then and there received to preach the Gospel among the Gentiles, even though he was forewarned that it was a work which would involve much suffering. When he cried out: “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” he meant not only to make an inquiry but to declare his readiness to obey the word of the Lord in all things. True conversion involves immediate surrender to Christ and immediate obedience to his commands.

2. The field of Paul's obedience.—This was fourfold. (i)

First in Damascus, that city toward which he journeyed to arrest and bind Christians. Thither he went and preached to them that Jesus is the Christ. He began to do good in the very place where he had planned to do evil. Surely this was evidence of a real change of heart. (ii) "At Jerusalem," in that city where he had actually persecuted the people of God, where he had been ringleader in the martyrdom of Stephen—in the city and among the rulers who had given him commission to arrest and bring Christians bound and doomed to death. There he in the next place repaired to preach the faith he had once sought to destroy. (iii) "Throughout all the coasts of Judea." Thus he widened the circle of his labors, but still among his own countrymen and in the territory and near the seat of the tragedy of the crucifixion and the triumph of the resurrection. He first declared the fact of the resurrection in the very places where he could have been easily refuted if it had been possible to deny it. (iv) Finally "to the Gentiles." These were they to whom he was chiefly commissioned to go. After having cleared the way to the Gentiles by preaching first to the Jews, he spent the greater part of his life among the former.

3. Paul's message to all men.—The Gospel which he preached was the same Gospel to all, and it had for its chief command this, or these three things: (i) That they should repent. That is, change their minds and take God's view of things. (ii) That, having changed their minds, they should turn their hearts and their lives to God. This is the end of repentance, namely, to reconcile us to God. (iii) That they should do works meet for repentance. True repentance and true faith are seen in works which show the law written in the heart and not on external tables of stone. The thief ceases to steal because he has learned to hate stealing; and so the liar ceases to lie because he now hates the lie and loves the truth. He who ceases to live an unclean life and begins to live a chaste and virtuous one, does so because he has come into similarity of feeling with God on all these and other points of morals. Thus did Paul teach the word of God to both Jew and Gentile.

4. Paul's offense to the Jews.—"For these causes the Jews caught me in the Temple and went about to kill me." That is, for declaring the resurrection and the divine Sonship of Jesus, whom they had rejected and crucified, and that God's salvation was through him extended to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. The offense of the cross has not ceased in any part of the world, and the narrowness and bigotry of the Jew is seen in many people who are not Jews by birth and blood. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the

one point on which unbelievers vent their wrath, for if it be true, there is absolutely no ground for unbelievers to stand on, and their condemnation is certain.

II.—PAUL'S GOSPEL.

Having stated the ground of the Jewish opposition and hatred, he turns again to explain further to his royal hearers concerning the Gospel and his relation to it, as his conduct as well as his teachings was in question.

1. Paul's steadfastness.—He glories in the fact that from the day he had met Christ and received his commission he had never swerved from his work in carrying it out. "I continue until this day witnessing both to small and great." Paul was "not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ," nor of being "the messenger of Christ," and, like his Master, he had no respect of persons. He declared the good tidings, as we have seen, to both Jew and Gentile; and now he adds, "both to small and great." Just now he was preaching to the great, but he as gladly declared it to the small and humble of the world. In this, his work and methods, he ever continued steadfast. If Paul had been a mere fanatic, his twenty-eight years of experience in connection with his mission would have taken any false enthusiasm out of him. Stripes, imprisonments, hunger and privation, wild beasts at Ephesus, shackles and bonds had been his portion, yet he continued until this day saying and doing none other things than those whereof he spoke.

2. Help from God.—Paul was no boaster. He would not have his hearers understand him as having been able of himself to have continued this work for all these years. It was not man's work, and so it was not work done in the mere energy of the flesh. "Having therefore obtained help of God," he had been enabled to continue until this day. Jesus had said, "Lo, I am with you always"; and Paul here declares that he had found this promise true.

3. Paul's Gospel again.—Having said so much, he returns again to the message which he delivered and had been delivering all these years. He first declares that it is not a new Gospel, especially not a heretical or a schismatic statement of doctrine contrary to the law of Moses, which the Jews accused him of teaching. "Saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come." Again Paul is careful to identify the Gospel of Christ with the law and the prophets, as the flower and fruit are identified

with the stock and stem on which they grow. Christ did not come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them. Analyzing these teachings, he reduces them to three points: (i) The sacrificial death of Christ. "That Christ should suffer." This is the burden of the prophets concerning the Messiah. He is a suffering Messiah, as is shown in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, which sums up all the Messianic prophecies. Jesus himself expounded the prophets to his disciples on this point. (Luke xxiv, 23-25, 44-46.) (ii) The resurrection of Christ from the dead. "That he should be the first that should rise from the dead." This Gospel includes and is founded on the fact of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, who thus brought to light life and immortality, and made a solid ground for hope, by confirming the Scriptures which had promised this thing, by declaring that Jesus was none other than the Son of God, and by confirming and ratifying the atonement, on the ground of which God can and does forgive sins. That he was the first to rise from the dead is sometimes questioned; but the meaning is that his resurrection was the wave sheaf of the whole resurrection harvest. The resurrection of Lazarus, for instance, guaranteed nothing. He no doubt died again. But Jesus was "the resurrection and the life." He dies no more, but brought immortality to light and made it sure to all who believe on him. (iii) To "show light unto the people and to the Gentiles." This also is the mission of Jesus, who is "the Light of the world," that "true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." He it is that illuminates all our darkness and floods all subjects with that radiancy of light in which we are enabled to see even unseen things.

III.—THE GOSPEL EVADED.

There is no doubt but that Paul was waxing enthusiastic, and was speaking with great earnestness. He had forgotten, if he ever thought so, that he was a prisoner giving an account of some doctrines for which he had been charged with heresy and sedition, and only remembered that he was the servant of God and the apostle of Jesus Christ, and that there were at least three distinguished sinners before him, to whom he might never again have an opportunity to speak. He longed to save them and present them to Jesus Christ. They were in his sight but men for whom Christ died, and their position in the state and their relation to him as judges did not alter his desire for them. He was as anxious as if they had been poor men; and so he rehearsed his story and preached the Gospel while so doing.

1. The surprise of Festus.—Festus was a Roman without any experience or knowledge of the peculiar doctrines of the Jews, and especially without knowledge of the doctrines of Christ, if indeed he had ever before heard of him at all. (xxv, 10, 19.) We fancy him listening with a mixture of interest and amazement as Paul told the story of his conversion. It was a most strange recital to him, yet there was that moral earnestness and dignity about Paul which claimed his respect as well as challenged his interest. But when Paul comes to speak of the resurrection, that was so startling a statement, so new and unusual, that he began to suspect that Paul was mad, or that he was some eager enthusiast who by much reading and pondering over books had become temporarily insane, being possessed with some strange religious mania; so that he burst out with a loud voice: "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." We must see in this not mere derision, else would he not have spoken in this loud and eager manner. He was deeply stirred, and Paul was exercising some strange influence over his mind by the solemn, awful, and inspiring truths he was uttering. He was in danger of being carried away, and so he could not refrain himself from crying out as he did. To charge madness on Paul would be to excuse himself from considering the things which Paul was saying. This is a convenient way of evading the truth. To denounce the preacher as a madman is of course to justify one's self in paying no heed to his sermon. Who is responsible for the ravings of a madman? Fanatics and fools have no claim upon our minds and consciences. Therefore, if we find the word too hot for us, let us denounce the preacher and declare him to be either crazy, a fool, or a knave. If a lawyer does not want a jury to consider some fatal bit of evidence which the opposing counsel has introduced, he will fall to abusing that attorney and thus distract the thought of the jury from the testimony. But Paul in a calm and dignified manner denied the impeachment: "I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." The objective truth was sober truth, as the subjective condition of his mind was truthfully sober. The dignity of Paul's answer must have refuted the charge which the governor brought against him.

2. An appeal to Agrippa.—Turning from Festus, who was excusable for not knowing the things whereof Paul affirmed in respect of Moses and the prophets, and of Jesus and the faith of the new and young Christian Church, Paul appealed to Agrippa and added a searching question to his appeal: "The king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely; for I am persuaded that

none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner." Here was a challenge to the knowledge of Agrippa, both as concerning the teaching of the Scriptures and the whole story of Christ. Agrippa does not deny the truth of Paul's statements, and thus tacitly admits their truth and confirms them. The Christian appeals not to fancy but to facts as wrought in the open day and in the public highway of history. This appeal to Agrippa was to convince Festus that his words were truth and spoken out of a sober and well-balanced mind, and not the ravings of a maniac.

3. A home question.—Having thus disposed of the statement of Festus, and seeing that his appeal to Agrippa as to the truth of his statements had suddenly wrought some kind of seriousness, perhaps conviction, because he had studied "psychology and physiognomy in the school of the Holy Spirit," he turned abruptly to the king and said, "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?" This was, as I have said, a home question. Had Agrippa been asked this question casually and in a formal manner, he would probably have answered "yes," without hesitation. But now it was put to him hot from the lips of a man to whom the prophets were the mouth of God, and who had shown to his royal auditor that they had been fulfilled in Christ, which the king did not deny. If Agrippa had said "yes," then there would have been nothing left for him to do but to confess himself a Christian. "I know that thou believest," added Paul, as he saw the workings of his mind through face and eye. He was determined not to lose his advantage, but to win that soul if possible.

4. The question evaded.—Agrippa was fairly cornered. He must confess, or extricate himself in some way from the dilemma into which Paul by his question had put him. He shuffled out as many a man has done since. Assuming a half-cynical tone, he says: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." This was partly ironical, though there was more than a grain of truth in it. Agrippa wished to convey this thought: "That is a short method, Paul; do you expect by so brief an argument to persuade me to become a Christian? I am not so easily persuaded as all that." And yet Paul's reply would imply that he had understood Agrippa seriously, that he was almost persuaded, though not prepared entirely, to give in to Christ.

5. The Christian gentleman.—Paul felt that he could go no further, but would not leave the matter without giving expression to his profound and tender interest in his royal auditors. There is

not a finer speech on record, both as to its touching pathos and the deep courtesy of it. "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." He would have them possessed of all the joys of salvation and freed from all the discomforts and heavy trials he had endured and was still enduring for Christ.

6. The conference adjourned.—The king would not hear further. The best way to get rid of troublesome questions and unanswerable arguments was to rise up and go away from the preacher. Like the young ruler, "he went away," whether sorrowful or not does not appear; but he withdrew from the sphere of Gospel influence, and disappears from the Gospel history, following that long line of men who have strangled their consciences and committed soul suicide.

7. Paul acquitted.—It was the common consent of governor and king that there was nothing in anything Paul had done or said that should subject him to imprisonment, and but for the fact that he had appealed to Cæsar they would have set him free. That appeal put the case out of the governor's hands, and so to Cæsar Paul must go, and there win fresh trophies for his Master.

XXXVI.

PAUL SHIPWRECKED.—Acts xxvii, 30-44.

(30) And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, (31) Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. (32) Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off. (33) And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. (34) Wherefore I pray you to take some meat; for this is for your health: for there shall not a hair fall from the head of any of you. (35) And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all; and when he had broken it, he began to eat. (36) Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. (37) And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. (38) And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea. (39) And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. (40) And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore. (41) And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. (42) And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. (43) But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: (44) And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.—Acts xxvii, 30-44.

After the hearing which had been granted to Paul by Festus, and the necessity which was put upon the Roman governor to send Paul to Rome (because of his appeal to Cæsar) at the first convenient opportunity, Paul with his companions, and presumably some other prisoners and a number of passengers traveling on business, embarked on a trading-ship for Italy. All went well for a season, but presently it became advisable to transfer all the prisoners to another ship, which perhaps was larger, and was bound direct to Italy from Alexandria. Fair weather accompanied them, but Paul foresaw danger ahead, and warned the centurion that it would be

better to lie by for the winter rather than face a certain storm which he foresaw, either by direct inspiration from God or by a superior nautical knowledge; for Paul was an old sailor, having made many voyages across that turbulent Mediterranean, one of the most treacherous seas in the world. The centurion, however, set aside Paul's advice, and followed that of the pilot and the owner of the ship and cargo, and determined to go forward. However, it came to pass as Paul had foretold, and the ship encountered a furious storm, which threatened not only the vessel and cargo but the lives of all on board. In the meantime God revealed to Paul by an angel that they should come out of the peril with safety. Paul at once communicated this intelligence to his fellow-passengers, and especially to the centurion, accompanied with a mild reproof for not having taken his former advice, and also with a manly and glorious declaration of his faith in God. He bade them be of good courage, for God had certainly promised him safety of the whole crew, though the ship would be destroyed and the cargo lost. This was the second time Paul the prisoner had practically taken the foremost place in the ship. Perhaps this time he was listened to with more respect and attention. Then came on dreadful days, in which they were tempest tossed, until one midnight by taking sounding they discovered that they were nearing some land, and their peril was increased by the danger of being wrecked on some unknown and rocky coast. In this plight the best thing to be done was to cast out anchors, which was done from the stern of the ship, that she might be in better position to make for the shore if a favorable opportunity for landing might appear. So far the chapter leads us. We are now at the point in the story where our study begins. Before entering upon it, it may be well to say that this story of sea-voyage, storm, and shipwreck recorded by Luke has been subjected to the most minute, searching, and scientific examination, and it has been demonstrated beyond controversy that it must have been written by an eye-witness, and that every detail of it is absolutely correct according to what must have happened under the assumed circumstances, so that it is no fancy sketch. The storm, the direction of the wind, the course of the ship, the currents and tides, the handling of the ship, the final wreck, and the very landing-place of the crew and passengers on the northeast coast of the island of Malta have all been identified. It would be the strangest thing in the world that the rest of the story contained in the Acts should be false or merely a fanciful composition. Even Renan acknowledges the genuineness and authenticity of this book of the New Testament. If this book con-

tains a true history it is impossible to doubt the truthfulness of the other books of the New Testament.

Many ingenious and helpful studies have been offered upon this part of the story of St. Paul. This particular voyage has been contrasted with that of Jonah. In the case of the Jewish prophet, he fled from the Lord and from Nineveh, where he had been sent to preach, while Paul is traveling in accordance with the will of God and in his company to the great heathen capital of the world, there to preach the Gospel. Jonah brought storm and threatened destruction upon the crew and ship in which he sailed; whereas Paul brought comfort to their hearts, strength to their bodies, and by his faith, coolness, cheerfulness, and sagacity saved them from disaster and death. Jonah was finally rescued from the jaws of death by a miracle; but Paul brought two hundred and seventy-six souls safe to the land from the mouth and maw of the devouring sea.

I.—THE PANIC AND TREACHERY OF UNBELIEF.

Our study begins with the thirtieth verse. Fourteen days before this point in the voyage Paul had been assured that for his sake God would save the entire ship's company. He had communicated this bit of good news to the centurion, the master of the ship, and the crew and passengers. They heard it possibly with a little interest but no faith, just as the world listens to the Gospel to-day. They possibly thought with Festus that Paul was a mad enthusiast, and that the account which he gave of the visit of God's angel was nothing more than the crazy imagination of a diseased brain; and yet Paul had shown himself a very sane man during this voyage, and his previous counsel had been better than that of the professional mariners. They had come to anchor at midnight, and were waiting for the day. At the first approach of the day the sailors, under pretense of casting out more anchors, sought to steal away in the ship's only boat and save themselves at the expense of leaving all the passengers to their fate.

1. **Unbelieving fear.**—Though they had been assured of safety by the word of God, they were unbelievers. They put not the least reliance in the word which Paul had spoken to them from God. Is it not so with the world to-day? God's word of "good cheer" is spoken to all on this poor old wreck of earth, assuring them of his love and care, and also his purpose of grace and power to save; but they take no heed of it, and when the hour of danger appears, those who are stout-hearted enough to reject the counsel of God are too

cowardly to face the danger, and so, falling into panic, attempt a salvation of their own.

2. The treachery and falsehood of unbelief.—These sailors were they to whom the safe-conduct of the ship and passengers was intrusted. Perhaps the master and pilot of the ship were in this plot. They did not hesitate to betray their trust, and under false pretense, and by means of treacherous lying, sought to carry out their dastardly purpose and flee from the ship, leaving it at the merey of wind and wave and the inexperience of landsmen. So will the unbelief of this world always betray us in the hour of danger. If we put our trust in science or in the worldly philosophy of the day, these will all desert us cruelly and treacherously in the hour of danger. Who ever heard of unbelievers and infidels visiting the dying bed of friends to comfort and help them in that dreadful hour? Who ever heard of infidels gathering about their victims when affliction and misfortune beat down upon them? “Confidence in an unfaithful (infidel) man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.” So says Solomon. And Jesus has told us that when the wolf appeareth the false shepherd will flee and leave the flock to destruction. It was so now with these panic-stricken, lying, and treacherous sailors.

3. The selfishness of unbelief.—There could hardly be conceived a more selfish or utterly heartless act than that which these sailors were about to enact. Had they leaped overboard saying that they preferred to take their chance in the sea rather than to abide on the ship, there would have been something courageous and even noble in it; but to attempt to steal away the boat which they conceived to be the only possible means of safety, and appropriate it to themselves, deliberately leaving their companions to go down in the wreck to which they were not brave enough to stick, was the very quintessence of selfishness. The fact is that unbelief is the root of all fear, all meanness, all unmanliness, and all inhumanity. Shun it, and shun those as your friends who practice it. Neither choose for business partners or social companions those who lightly esteem or altogether reject the word of God. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”

II.—THE CALMNESS AND COURAGE OF FAITH.

In strong contrast with the action of the cowardly sailors is the conduct of Paul, who now for the third time seems to be the only master of the situation. It is a great thing for a man when he has

Christ in his life, as it was for this ship's company to have this man of faith on board with them. Paul, perceiving the real purpose of the cowardly and dastardly sailors, at once spoke to the centurion and the soldiers, exposing their plot. How he knew it is probably to be accounted for by his large experience, which taught him that the alleged purpose of the sailors was false, and enabled him to see into their treacherous design. How calm and cool he was! He did not make a great ado about it. He did not remonstrate with the sailors. He did not go to the pilot and the owner, who were probably in the plot, but to the centurion, who, ignorant of the ways of ships and sailors, had been deceived by their declaration of purpose to put out more anchors, and to him he exposed the plot.

1. **“Except these abide in the ship.”**—Thus he said to the centurion, “Ye cannot be saved.” He appealed not for his own safety but to their own danger. Unselfish thus is the true Christian whose faith is stayed on Christ. The statement is not in contradiction with the positive affirmation made by Paul previously that the whole ship's company should be saved. God's promises always include the means, both divine and human, for their accomplishment. (Ezek. xxxvi, 36, 37; Luke iv, 9, 12.) There is nothing superhuman implied. It was perfectly clear to Paul that when the time came to take up the anchor and make for the land they would be utterly helpless without the help and knowledge of the seamen. If they should desert the ship the landsmen would be helpless. God meant to save the whole company, but he meant to do it by human means. If, therefore, the very means by which God intended to work were deliberately withdrawn, his purpose could not be fulfilled. God frequently uses even bad men to carry out his purposes of grace, and he restrains and constrains their actions to that end.

2. **Cutting away the boat.**—By this time the centurion and even the soldiers had learned to respect Paul's judgment and were willing to be guided by his judgment, especially when Paul put before them the case as it was. So without a word, and before the sailors could lower the boat, they drew their swords and cut the running gear from the davits and let the boat down into the sea empty and adrift. Thus, some one has said, they abandoned the only means of escape from the sinking ship and intrusted themselves to the better life-boat of Paul's word, which was God's word. Men are not far from salvation when they abandon utterly mere human resources and schemes, such as good works and mere religious formalism, and trust utterly to God's word. God said they should be

saved. They would trust him at any rate this once, especially rather than submit to the treason of the present unbelieving sailors.

3. Taking meat.—Now that the danger of being left without a skilled working force was overpast, Paul turns his attention to a very practical matter. He was now the real commander of the ship. The whole crew and all the landsmen seemed to recognize in this prisoner a man who knew what he was about, and who had a secret of confidence which they did not possess. It is not uncommon for unbelievers in dire distress to turn to Christians for help, at whom they have scoffed before. Paul does not waste time in scolding or denouncing the traitors, for before them was the practical business of preparing for the last struggle with the sea which he foresaw. For fourteen days the entire crew and passengers, through fear and anxiety, confusion and labor, had scarcely partaken of food. They had had, in fact, no regular meals, and had lived from hand to mouth. Now Paul reminds them of their weakened condition, and entreats them to take food. Physical strength was of more importance to them than anything else. It was better to eat than to pray *then*. He assures them that there shall not a hair of their heads perish, reiterating the promise of God previously given to them. His faith was for the moment infectious, and they all fell to and ate heartily.

4. Giving thanks.—Paul set them the example. The food having been prepared, he first gave thanks before them all. He would have them understand that they were in God's hands, and since he, Paul, had taken command of the ship, he would order it according to God's law. Food is God's gift to us and not to be taken without thanksgiving. He was not ashamed of his faith, but "gave thanks to God in presence of them all." How many of us fail in these two points. We assume that food and other necessary things are of our own procuring, and even if we are secretly thankful we are either afraid or ashamed to confess God before men. Real faith has the courage of its hope and is not ashamed of God anywhere.

5. Good cheer.—Previously (v. 22) Paul had bade them be of "good cheer," but they had not heeded him. But now, after fourteen days, they were coming around to his views of things, and were in a measure partakers of his faith. They were all of good cheer, after a hearty meal taken with thanksgiving, and as it were from the hand of a host who was full of strong confidence. Oftentimes our depression and fears arise from hunger or a disordered bodily condition, and our faith and courage are always stimulated by the presence of a hopeful leader. Let us take care of our bodies, giving

thanks to God for all his goodness, "looking to Jesus" our great Commander, and we shall be of good cheer.

III.—THE LAST OF THE SHIP.

As soon as the day had fairly dawned, with renewed courage they prepared themselves for the last effort. There were nearly three hundred souls on board. The human cargo was very precious. The importance of frustrating the wicked designs of the sailors was now apparent. The ship must be gotten ready to make her last effort to reach the shore: the anchors cut adrift, the rudder bands loosed, and the small foresail set to carry the ship before the wind toward the shore now looming up in the west.

1. Lightening the ship.—The cargo consisted of wheat, being carried from Alexandria to Italy. It was valuable, but it was important that the ship should be of as light draught as possible when she came into the shallow water. It was wealth, but what is wealth compared to human life? "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" The universal answer is, "Nothing." "Millions of money for an inch of time" is said to have been the cry of Elizabeth of England when lying on her death-bed. So the cargo of wheat went overboard without delay or hesitation. Many a soul has been wrecked in sight of land because he would not unload his cargo of wealth. The young ruler was in sight of land, but he was very rich, and when he heard the Master's word, "Sell that thou hast and give to the poor, . . . and come and follow me," he was sorrowful and decided to take his chances and save his cargo. They both went down together. Save the wheat if you can, but if it stands between you and life, out with it into the sea! So of every other thing that hinders you on your way to the haven of safety.

2. Land ahead.—The sight of the land was a sign of hope to these tempest-tossed people. So is the hope set before us in the Gospel. Out of darkness and storm God's salvation looms large and full of hope for all men. It is within reach, too. The land was strange to them. They had never sailed that way before; but when the day was fully awake they discovered a certain creek or narrow channel, which divided the main land of the island from a smaller island. It seemed to them that they might make the shore in safety there. So they were minded to drive the ship to that point. It is even so with salvation. The port toward which we are directed is a new and strange one, not familiar to sinners; but there is a glimmer-

ing of hope in the narrow harbor which is discerned. We do not know all the truth or see the whole of God's purpose; but there are one or two promises which suggest an opening into the land into which a soul may escape for his life, out and away from the angry sea.

3. God help us.—"And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands." There was nothing for it now but to trust God. They could do nothing more. No skill or seamanship could save them. God must help or they must perish. So it is with the sinner: cut away the old anchors that hold you to the place of human safety, loose your rudder band, hoist the little sail of faith, and commit yourself to the sea with your prow toward God's promise. Driving into the little creek, the forepart of the ship stuck fast in the sand and mud; the sea caught the hinder part of the ship and broke it away. So the old life goes to pieces on the shore of God's promise. All our past help fails utterly. There is nothing left now but the next step, and that is to fling one's self clear of the old sinking wreck and plunge into the sea and swim for the shore or float toward it, on whatever there may be at hand to help. This strikes me as being suggestive of the utter abandonment of the sinner in a deep and confessed conviction of sin and helplessness.

4. Evil counsel frustrated.—The Roman soldiers, obeying the instinct of discipline, counseled to kill the prisoners, lest escaping to shore they might escape from their custody, which would disgrace them and jeopardize their own lives. But the centurion first desiring, like a true soldier, to bring Paul and the rest to Rome, where he had been charged to deliver them, and besides willing or wishing to save Paul (whom he must have learned to respect and even in a sense to fear), and not forgetting that he had saved all their lives, dissuaded the soldiers or forbade them, and so saved Paul and the rest of the prisoners. There is a time and there are occasions when a wise administrator may relax discipline and even disobey a lower law in order to carry out a higher. The higher law is not understood by many, but when it is clearly perceived it must be obeyed. The centurion disobeyed the Roman law in sparing Paul's life under the circumstances, but he obeyed the higher law of God, of which he only perceived the faint outlines in his own conscience and sense of right and gratitude.

5. Safe at land.—So they flung themselves into the sea and all got safely to shore, some swimming and some on the wreckage of the ship. God's promise had been fulfilled to the letter, and they

were all saved. May we not see in this a prophecy of the salvation of all men who will take God at his word, commit themselves to the direction of his Spirit, abandon the old rotten, broken, and water-logged ship of human nature, and cast themselves out toward his land of promise? "And so it came to pass that they escaped all safe to the land."

XXXVII.

PAUL AT ROME.—Acts xxviii, 20-31.

(20) For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. (21) And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee. (22) But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against. (23) And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. (24) And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. (25) And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, (26) Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: (27) For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. (28) Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. (29) And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. (30) And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, (31) Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.—Acts xxviii, 20-31.

This chapter down to the fifteenth verse details to us the further experiences of Paul after his shipwreck, on his way to Rome, which he reached after about four months. The sixteenth verse shows us how he entered the great city, the capital of the world, a prisoner, bound to a soldier to prevent his escape. What cared the proud emperor of the world that this insignificant Jew had come to his capital? At the most, he was only another of those Jews whom he and his predecessors so hated. As for being a Christian, he was probably as indifferent to that fact as he was in the habit of putting contempt and scorn on that mean little sect which had sprung up among the Jews and had gathered a few converts from the slaves and lowest class of Romans. And yet there was entering into Rome at that moment, in the custody of the centurion, a greater conqueror

than any of the Cæsars had been ; one whose life and words, inspired by the spirit of his divine Master, were destined to overturn not only the ancient classical religions of the Roman Empire, but the very throne and empire itself.

Paul had won the courtesy of the centurion, and perhaps more than his courtesy, by his wisdom, his faith, and the evident presence within him of some power new and strange to him. Therefore when he delivered him over to the captain some exceptional privileges were accorded to Paul which were not to the other prisoners, and he was permitted to dwell alone with only one soldier chained to him as his companion. (v. 16.) After a few days of rest Paul sent for the leading Jews of Rome (not Christian Jews) to explain to them the reason for his being in Rome at all. He explained to them that he was guiltless of any offense, either against his nation or the religious customs of the people ; that he was a prisoner at Rome for *no* offense, for in fact he had been three times tried and yet nothing found against him ; that he would have been set at liberty, but the Jews had so persistently objected, and sought his life, that he was compelled to appeal to Cæsar in self-defense ; that therefore he had come to Rome with no intention of laying any charge against his nation or his kindred according to the flesh.

I.—PAUL'S FIRST INTERVIEW WITH THE JEWS.

Having first vindicated himself from any suspicion that he was either a man personally guilty of offense against his nation or the religious customs of the Jews, he expresses a strong desire to see and speak with the leaders of his people in Rome. This was so far gratified that upon sending for them they had come to him, and now he wishes to open up the whole matter in controversy between the Jews and the Christian.

1. **Paul's love for the Jews.**—The action of Paul in first sending for the Jewish leaders before having met with the Christian brethren seems a little strange. After all he had suffered at their hands one would have supposed that they were the last people he would care to see. Ordinary men would have confined their intercourse to converted Jews and the new Gentile brethren who had been introduced into the church at Rome. But Paul was not an ordinary person. In his great love for his nation, in his yearning desire to see them converted to Christ, not for the sake of any partisan success, but for their own spiritual welfare and the glory of God, he forgot the personal wrongs received at their hands, not once only, but

through almost thirty years, and sought by disarming their prejudices the better to enable himself to speak earnestly to them concerning "the hope of Israel." In this we see how great was his love, how unselfish his purpose, how persistent the determination of his will, if it were possible to win his kinsmen according to the flesh. To Paul the thought of Israel losing and being cut off from the hope with which God had inspired them through all the long prophetic ages, was almost intolerable. We have seen how cheerfully and gladly he preached the Gospel to the Gentiles; but that Israel should be cut off by their own unbelief was a heart-breaking thought to him. In all history there is not the record of so unselfish a man and a ministry as is seen in this man Paul.

2. The hope of Israel.—The chain with which they saw him bound would ordinarily be a badge of disgrace, the *prima facie* evidence that he was a malefactor of some kind. But Paul was not ashamed of his chain. To him it was a badge of honor. He wore it as a proud ornament. It was for the hope of Israel that he was bound; than which there was not a nobler or a more glorious and worthier cause. In this expression "the hope of Israel," and Paul's use and identification of himself with it, by which he appealed to the Jews then listening to him, we have the unmistakable declaration of the Apostle that the true faith and hope of the Jew is the same as that of the Christian. This was a constant claim of Paul. (xxiii, 6; xxiv, 14, 15, 21; xxvi, 6, 22, 23.) "This hope is comprehended in the two great facts of Christianity. (i) The appearance in the world of the Messiah—"God manifested in the flesh." This is that for which Israel had been hoping all through the ages. To this hope the prophets from the beginning had given witness: that there should come into the world One who would in fact be their own Jehovah, and that through him all the promises of God would be fulfilled. To set these hopes before our readers would be to quote from every book in the Old Testament and to expound as well as call attention to the significance of all the Jewish ceremonial. (ii) The second point in the hope of Israel was the glorious life of immortality which was finally brought to light by the Gospel in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. On these two points, "Jesus and the resurrection," hung all the apostolic teaching; as these two points were those toward which all the Scriptures converged. Therefore he urged that the hope of Israel and the Christian faith were one and the same. Israel had hoped for this coming and revelation; the Christian believed that the coming and revelation were fulfilled in the person and resurrection of Christ. This is more fully brought

out in the great sermon contained in the thirteenth chapter of this book. I have had occasion in this strange and wonderful land to point out to the Hindoos from their own scriptures how all the highest aspirations of their fathers pointed to Christ, and had their most perfect fulfillment in him. No doubt if we could get at the basic truth of all the religions of the earth we would find in them a prophecy and hope of Christ, and in Christ we would find a fulfillment of these prophecies and hopes. I believe this is the true line upon which to press the Gospel among all alienate faiths, and more especially so among the Hindoos.

3. The reply of the Jews.—There is certainly a marked contrast between the attitude of the Roman Jews and those of Jerusalem. Their residence in Rome, while it had not changed their faith, had done something to make them more tolerant and less fanatical. They assured Paul that they had received no word concerning him either by letter from Judea or by word of mouth from any one coming from Palestine. No evil report of him had reached them, therefore his justification of himself was unnecessary. Yet what he had told them of his devotion to their common nation and his sincere attachment to the sacred Scriptures, and especially his identification of “the hope of Israel” and the faith of the Christian, had awakened in them a curiosity to hear what he had further to say on the subject. The answer was frank enough in words, but there is no doubt but that there was a certain cold reserve and contemptuous spirit in the whole bearing of the Jews. This is especially brought out in their concluding remark.

4. The sect everywhere spoken against.—Paul had evidently declared himself a Christian in the course of his brief introductory statement. The Jews, referring to the Christians, said: “For as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against.” There was that about Paul which compelled their respect, but as for the sect to which he belonged, they spoke of it as a small body of people who had succeeded in awakening against itself universal contempt and hatred. They knew nothing of the sect or teaching themselves, but had accepted a popular verdict against it. They were not ignorant of its existence, but were and had been too prejudiced to make any personal inquiry concerning it or to investigate its teachings or the ground of its faith. This is the common attitude of a multitude of people toward Christianity to-day. They speak not of the sect, but of the sects, and declare that the common name of them is evil. They have heard evil things of certain ministers and missionaries, of certain persons connected with the Christian

Church; and readily and easily crediting all evil speech, they justify themselves in an aggressive ignorance, which, clothed in contemptuous speech, seeks to hide its face from honesty and truth. Christianity is in no sense a sect—not a mere fragment broken off from the truthful whole. It is the beautiful fruit which has proceeded out of the flower of all the promises of God that have bloomed on the tree of prophecy from the beginning of the world. It is the culmination of all the hopes of all peoples of the earth, and more especially of the Jews.

II.—PAUL'S SECOND INTERVIEW WITH THE JEWS.

Having expressed their desire to hear what Paul had to say, they appointed a day on which they would return to his lodgings and enter into the question with him. When the day came the leaders who were present at the first interview returned, bringing with them a large company of other Jews. The conference was held in Paul's lodging, because he was still a prisoner and not free to go and come as he pleased, though permitted, it seems, to receive all persons who wished to visit him.

1. The kingdom of God.—This was the theme of Paul's discourse. It was his only theme, either with Jew or Gentile, for Jesus and his resurrection is the central feature of this great kingdom. He proceeded in his usual way. (i) He appealed to the Scriptures. "Persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets." (xxviii, 23.) Paul was no vain speculator. He believed in God and in the revelation which God had made of himself, and his purposes toward man. These were to him the source of all authority for the preacher. He did not seek in the depths of his personal consciousness for the truth, but simply appealed to the law and to the testimony. For passages of Scripture referred to, the following were no doubt some of them: Gen. xl, 10; Num. xxiv, 17; Deut. xviii, 15, 18; Ps. ii, 6, 12; xvi, 9-11; xxii, xl, lxxii, ex; Is. vii, 14; ix, 6; xi, 1-10; xl, 1-11; xlii, 1-7; xlix, 1-9; l, 2-6; lii, 13-15 and liii, lxi, 1-3; Jer. xxiii, 5, 6; Ezek. xxxiv, 23; Dan. vii, 13, 14; ix, 24-26; Micah v, 2; Haggai ii, 7; Zech. vi, 12, 13; ix, 9; xi, 12; xii, 10; Mal. iii, 1; iv, 2; Luke xxiv, 27ff; John i, 45; v, 39; Rev. xix, 10. These, with many other Scriptures, would have afforded Paul ample material for his all-day conference with the Jews on the subject of the kingdom of God. In discussing this subject with them, I am sure he must have set before them the great fact that the essence of the kingdom was spiritual and not

temporal; that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost"; that it was not a great political hierarchy to be ushered in with pomp of earthly greatness, but that it "cometh not with observation"; that it was a kingdom in which the king sat enthroned in the hearts of his people and reigned over them through righteousness wrought out by means of law and grace written in and filling their hearts; that whatever the future glory of Israel might be under the personal reign of Christ, that reign could never take place before Christ had first set them free from sin; political and personal freedom could avail them nothing so long as they were bound with sin and enslaved by Satan's chain; that the true badge of this kingdom was not an outward sign in the flesh but an inward circumcision of the heart; that men, even Jews, entered it not by natural but by spiritual birth. After this fashion must Paul have reasoned with them. The whole of the Epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians are but the substance of this long discourse which Paul had with the Jews that day in Rome. Jesus was the key to all the Scriptures, and the beginning, middle, and end of all the argument. He "persuaded them concerning Jesus." He must have shown them how Jesus met every requirement of prophecy, how he fulfilled every type and shadow of the ceremonial, how he was that "Prophet" of whom Moses spoke, that Priest of whom Aaron was the type, that King of whom David and Solomon were the great prototypes. He must have clearly demonstrated the fact that the wounded and bruised sufferer of Isaiah (liii) was and could be none other than Jesus. It must have been a wondrous discourse, and one cannot but regret that Luke did not report it in full. His method was his old one. (i) He expounded. That is, he opened the Scriptures and showed them what the kingdom of God must in the nature of the case mean. He read it and gave the sense. Like a true exegete as he was, he laid his foundation in exposition. (ii) He testified. That is, he pointed out all the facts concerning Jesus which bore upon the Scriptures. He told of his birth, his miracles, his teaching, his death, and the manner of it, and of his resurrection. All this he testified to, and then he showed how these various events in the life of Christ perfectly fitted into the prophetic declarations concerning the Messiah. (iii) Finally he persuaded. That is, he sought by tender and well-directed appeal to their intelligence, their hearts, and their consciences, to draw these Jews into acceptance and confession of Christ. He did not argue and expound and testify for the sake of the argument. His whole desire was to win the Jews to Christ; to the hope of Israel;

to their own salvation; and to the glory of God. In all this we find that Paul was not afraid or ashamed to repeat his addresses or his methods. No man repeated discourses more than Paul did. He never repeated himself, for he never preached himself. He repeated the Scriptures and the truth of God, and that we cannot do too often.

2. The effect of Paul's address.—It was of old, as it ever will be. "Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not." Even Paul could not win all his hearers. We need not be discouraged if we do no better than he. It is the result of men's attitude toward the truth that Jesus goes through the world like a plow, turning men into double furrows, some of them believing and some believing not; thus does Christ part men as a plow parts the soil.

3. Disagreement among themselves.—The effect of Paul's discourse was not alone that it divided the company into believers and unbelievers, but it divided the unbelievers into groups of antagonistic opinion. They—that is, those who believed not—agreed not among themselves. Unbelievers seldom do agree among themselves. Unbelieving scientists and philosophers are in more hopeless disagreement with each other than they are even with Christ and Christianity.

III.—PAUL'S LAST WORD.

As the company were breaking up after the long day's discussion, Paul discerned the determined attitude of unbelief among the most of them. He saw that so far as it was possible to convince them of the truth they *were convinced*; but they were determined not to submit to the truth. Paul addressed a final word to them,—a word of warning, and yet a word of love, hoping that at last this word might arouse them.

1. The hardening of the heart.—He saw what they were doing, and it grieved and distressed him. So he quoted a passage from Isaiah which fairly described their present attitude of mind: "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias." In this Paul fully recognizes the divine inspiration of the prophet Isaiah. He at least had not learned what so many of our learned (?) critics pretend to have discovered, that the book of Isaiah is simply Jewish literature, and not the inspired word of God. This word of Isaiah (vs. 26, 27) clearly declared that the Jews would, through their persistent attitude of unbelief, bring their hearts into a state of hardness which would be fatal to their acceptance of the Messiah when he should come. They shall hear the truth, but they will not hear it spiritually; seeing the truth they

will not perceive its importance. By persistently hardening their hearts and stopping their ears and closing their eyes they shall have lost the power of believing. They do not want to be converted, therefore they have shut up every avenue to the soul. It is not that God has done this to them. They have done it themselves, and have suffered as a punishment the very thing which they have desired and which has now come upon them,—spiritual incapacity, blindness of eye, deafness of ear, and grossness of heart. There are men of to-day, who, though not Jews, are bringing upon themselves exactly this condition. There are men who have already brought spiritual hardness upon themselves. The exhortation of the Scripture, “To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart,” is an exhortation of most tremendous moment. God wants to convert and heal every soul in this vast world of ours, but if men *will* not see the truth, will not hear it, and will not receive it into good and honest hearts, God himself cannot convert and save them.

2. The Gospel preached to the Gentiles.—This was Paul’s last appeal to the Jews. He did not turn to the Gentiles out of pique. It was the purpose of God that the Jews themselves first converted to Christ should be the great evangelizers of the world, and inherit the riches (spiritually) of the Gentiles; but since they had rejected the Gospel themselves, God by his Apostle turned now to the Gentiles and gave over to them the riches of his grace, and from them, rather than from the Jews, he gathers his Church, and upon them he bestows all the wealth of his love. “They,” the Apostle informs the Jews, “will hear it.” The Apostle tells this secret of God’s purpose to the Jews not to anger them, but, if possible, to stir them up by a kind of spiritual jealousy to accept the Gospel themselves. (Rom. xi, 11; xv, 8, 16.) The Apostle had already explained this to both Jew and Gentile in his Epistle to the Romans, written years before.

3. Great reasoning.—After thus listening to Paul’s one “last word,” the Jews, that is, the unbelieving among the number, who had been present at the conference went out and “had great reasoning among themselves.” This was all very well, if it had led them to any right decision; but reasoning which does not bring a man to faith is pretty sure to land him in deeper darkness. When men hold the truth in unrighteousness, and become vain in their own imaginations, their foolish hearts became darkened (Rom. i, 21) and they get farther from God than ever. Nobody ever hears the Word of God without being to some extent altered or affected by it. They either find themselves drawn nearer to God by yielding to its per-

suasion, or repelled farther from God by resisting its testimony. The Gospel is therefore that savor of life or death to men which this same Apostle declares it to be. (II. Cor. ii, 16.)

IV.—PAUL CONTINUES HIS MINISTRY.

The last two verses of our chapter give us the conclusion of this record by Luke. For two years after this ministry, Paul, though still a prisoner, seems to have been but a nominal one, something as John Bunyan was for a time in Bedford jail. His ministry was the same as ever. Dwelling in his own hired house, his congregation came to him, and he preached the kingdom of God, "teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."

Thus closes the record of the life and work of the most remarkable man in all Christian times—a man whose loyalty to Christ, whose zeal for his service, whose love for men, whose great-hearted unselfishness, and whose age-long influence have never been equaled or excelled by any living man. He stands next in greatness to his own great Master, though not on the same plane. Jesus Christ was both Lord and Christ; Paul was his servant and disciple, and gloried in nothing so much as being both disciple and servant, counting not his life dear to himself if he might finish his ministry with faithfulness and joy.

XXXVIII.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY.—Romans xiv, 12-23.

(12) So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. (13) Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. (14) I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. (15) But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. (16) Let not then your good be evil spoken of: (17) For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. (18) For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. (19) Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. (20) For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. (21) It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. (22) Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. (23) And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.—Romans xiv, 12-23.

This is confessedly a very difficult chapter to interpret with exactness. There is an easy and general impression of its meaning lying on the surface, so that every one may read as he runs, and run as he reads. It is this: that those who are strong ought to be patient with those who are weak, and be careful, in the exercise of their lawful liberty in things allowable, not to offend, or cause a brother who is not equally strong to trip and fall; that it is better to use liberty for self-denial than for gratification at the expense of others.

The difficulty which first presents itself is to determine what was the occasion of this application by the Apostle Paul of the law of charity. There seems to have been two parties (not divisions) in the church at Rome. Perhaps we had better say two classes of believers there. The one class was a strong and vigorous majority, who were thoroughly in sympathy with the Pauline doctrine of liberty in Christ, and who regarded the whole life as under sanctification, and did not recognize the narrow distinction of holy and unholy as applied to the mere creatures of God, whether in respect

of meats and drinks or of days and seasons. To them all things which were in themselves calculated to give pleasure to the appetite and not harmful to the body were lawful, either in the way of eating or drinking. All days were alike to them holy days, because God had in their redemption sanctified all time as well as all things. Motive and relation to God were the principles which guided them, rather than ceremonial distinctions. The other class was a smaller one in number and weaker in faith and the apprehension of the wide extent of that "liberty wherewith Christ has made us free." The stronger party felt at perfect liberty to eat meat and drink wine, while the weaker party were sensitive in their consciences as to both eating meat and drinking wine, and confined themselves to a strictly vegetable diet. The stronger party was undoubtedly made up chiefly of Gentile converts, and possibly a few Jewish converts whose long residence in Rome had liberalized them by coming in contact with a larger culture, of those who, like Paul, were enabled to grasp firmly and promptly the great truths of redemption in relation to all things both in heaven and in earth. The other party were most likely Jewish believers who were more or less bound by ceremonial traditions; though it must be observed that there is nothing in the law of Moses that forbade a Jew to eat meat or to drink wine, except in the case of a priest while on active duty, or a Nazarite while his vow was upon him. It is more likely that there was a party of vegetarians in the church, who on embracing Christianity felt that they ought to live as simply as possible, and mark by that living a distinction between themselves and the world; just on the same principle that led the Quakers to adopt and wear a simple style of dress as a protest against the excesses of dress current in their day even among the professors of religion.

It should be observed, also, that the place of eating and drinking was also a factor in the discussion. This teaching of Paul had not so much to do with the private or domestic habits of the strong Christians to whom he gave this admonition, as to certain practices indulged in at the celebration of the then common and popular love-feasts of the church. (I. Cor. xi, 20-22; Jude 12.) It was the custom of the early Church to meet together daily, and in the place of assembly to take the common or principal meal. Everybody brought their own provisions as far as they were able. The rich brought their abundance and the poor their scanty and frugal portions. At first the table was common, and all partook of the common supply. After a while these love-feasts became less informal and were made the occasion of the coming together of little social cliques. The rich

would bring their food, and without waiting for the poor and offering to make a common meal, proceed to eat and drink by themselves. Great abuses of this kind sprang up in the church at Corinth, so great, indeed, that it was not uncommon for men to go away from the feast drunken and surfeited with wine and food. To such Paul administered the stinging rebuke contained in the eleventh chapter of his first epistle to that church. Now at Rome, while there do not seem to have been such excesses, yet when the church were assembled for their love-feast it was manifest that those who brought meat and wine with them were giving offense to the smaller party, who felt that to eat meat and drink wine at the love-feast was wrong. Paul calls them weak brethren, yet he recognizes the sacredness of their consciences and convictions in this matter, and urges upon the strong brethren the duty of bearing with them. I think it most important to keep this fact in mind, that the injunction of charity here refers to those places of public assembly where both classes met under semi-religious circumstances, or, if you please, wholly religious circumstances, and did not refer to the actions of the stronger brethren in their more private and personal relations and habits. The weaker brethren might protest against a certain practice in connection with an act of worship in the Church of God, when he would not have been allowed to carry his censorship to a man's private house.

The controversy between these classes was a sore one. The weaker brethren were censorious, inclined not only to blame but to pass judgment upon the brethren who exercised their liberty in eating and drinking. On the other hand, the stronger brethren were haughty and contemptuous in their treatment of their less free brethren. It was to correct both these evils that the Apostle wrote. After all, spirit here is worth more than the letter of action. A strong brother might abstain from exercising his liberty out of deference to a weak brother in such a way as to give more offense than if he had gone his own way in spite of protest. He might have flung his meat on the floor and dashed his wine-cup to the ground, and then uttered some sneering remark upon the narrowness and bigotry of his weak brother, which would have wounded him more deeply and been more apt to cause him to fall than if he had refused courteously to yield his liberty to the demands of his brother's prejudice. Paul urges upon both parties that there is essentially no harm in the matter of eating and drinking. One man eateth meat and drinketh wine. There is no harm or wrong in so doing. Another confines himself to vegetable diet. Well, if he chooses to adopt this manner of living he has the right to do so. The vegetarian must not censure

his more liberal brother because he does not see that God requires him to become a vegetarian. On the other hand, the more free liver must not despise the brother and hold him in contempt because he does not see his way clear to so large a liberty. Yet in the present controversy, while recognizing the abstract rightness of the stronger party, Paul takes, as it were, the weaker party under his protection, and pleads that the stronger party yield their liberty in favor of their charity. He does not demand the giving up of meat and wine because they were evil things, nor does he demand it at all. He only points out that to do so under the circumstances would be Christlike, and more becoming the strong than for the strong to insist upon the weak coming up to his standard by an arbitrary forcing of his conscience. In this controversy there is no doubt that the strong have rights which the weak ought to recognize, and that it is the duty of the weak party to tone up their consciences and move into a stronger position. In the controversy to-day between the aggressive total abstainer and the Christian man who exercises his liberty in drinking wine, the attitudes of the parties are changed, for the modern total abstainer is a very robust character, and he is the one who takes the whip handle in the controversy, and he is the party of the majority in the Church just now. I venture to suggest whether the present strong party might not be a little more charitable in their judgment, and less censorious and arrogant in their demands. It is a good thing to exercise charity on both sides of a "doubtful question." If the vegetarians and total abstainers of Paul's day had been in the strong majority and were running roughshod over their mere "temperance and temperate brethren," denouncing them as "wine-bibbers and gluttons," then I fancy Paul would have taken the meat-eating and wine-drinking Christians under his protection. I believe he would do so to-day, not that he would encourage drunkenness nor that he might not advocate total abstinence in the present circumstances, but that he would forbid an uncharitable attitude toward those who saw their way and liberty clear in the matter of eating and drinking. There is a doctrine of charity which can be pressed into the practice of bigotry and intolerance, and we should be as careful about not doing that as we are to walk charitably in the surrender of our rights to the weakness of the weak brethren.

I.—A GENERAL PROPOSITION.

Having opened the question and stated both sides of it, the Apostle proceeds to lay down a general truth in respect of judgment.

In the twelfth verse he reminds the Romans of the fact that "every one of us shall give account of himself to God." This is the conclusion from the eleventh verse, and was intended to pave the way for the earnest advice contained in the thirteenth verse.

1. Against judging one another.—"Let us not therefore judge one another any more." Judge not thy brother, for God will judge *him*—such is the teaching in the tenth verse; on the other hand, in the twelfth verse we are reminded that it would be well to judge ourselves, since God will also judge *us*. The obvious course for us to pursue is to abstain from judging one another, for that is God's business and not ours. We had much better be preparing ourselves for the judgment-seat of Christ than be usurping his functions against our brother. "But," adds the Apostle, "if you cannot abstain from judgment, let it fall upon yourself, and lead you to this decision rather, that no man put a stumbling-block or an occasion of offense in his brother's way." Here the Apostle takes the side of the weak brother *because he is weak*, and counsels the strong brother *because he is strong* to be careful not to do anything that will either wound the feelings or conscience of his weak brother or cause him to do a scandalous thing, that is, from his own point of view. To twit the vegetarian with narrowness and prejudice because he cannot or will not eat meat or drink wine is to wound his feelings, for he is conscientious in his abstinence; to tempt him to do what is wrong in his own eyes is to scandalize his conscience and so cause him to fall. It was not the mere question of example, but of bitter speech and taunts hurled at the weak brother, and the deliberate attempts made to get him to abandon his position of abstinence against his conscience.

2. Nothing unclean in itself.—Paul for the moment shifts his position, and makes haste to assure the brother upon whose charity he is about to make a large draft that there is nothing unclean in itself in the way of either meat or drink. This he says he knows out of his common judgment as one acquainted with Jewish ceremonial; but he is also persuaded by the Lord Jesus, and that by reason of his knowledge of the mind of Christ. Whatever wrong there may be in eating meat or drinking wine is to be located in the fact of doing it when there is a conviction, whether rightly or wrongly reached, that to eat or drink any particular thing in any given circumstances is sinful. *It is the violation of conscience* which is the evil thing to be avoided, and not the meat or drink, which cannot be evil in itself. Therefore he adds: "To him that *esteemeth* anything to be unclean to *him* it is unclean." With Paul it is always a question of con-

science rather than a particular act or thing. Paul honored the conscience above all things, and strove always to preserve his void of offense, and exercised himself in this matter, therefore he was jealous for any one else who was making a like struggle to preserve purity of conscience.

3. A plea for charity.—He turns now to the strong brother and draws a draft on his charity. “But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably” (or in love). You may be entirely within your right, and doing no harm either to your conscience or in fact, but remember your weak brother. He thinks you are doing wrong, and it pains him for you to do this thing in defiance of his conscience, especially when you taunt him with his weakness. Such a course on your part may destroy your brother, for whom Christ died. Or you may lead him to override his conscience in order to escape your sneer or contempt, and thereby destroy him; for no man can long violate his conscience without destroying his soul. “Let not then your good be evil spoken of.” The good referred to here is “Christian liberty,” not meat and drink. It is a good thing that you have attained unto a larger liberty in Christ than the weak brother, but it would be a pity to have Christian liberty brought into disrepute by pressing personal privileges to such an extent as to override a weak brother. You may have the right of way in the road, but if a weak brother has gotten himself into a wrong position, you need not run him down simply because you have the right to the road he is obstructing, especially if he is obstructing it not willfully but in ignorance and weakness. One need not always assert his rights. So a Christian may exercise his liberty sometimes by giving it up. I am free to eat meat and drink wine. There is nothing wrong in either, but my liberty does not compel me to do so under all circumstances; and so I am free not to eat meat or drink wine, if I choose to do so out of charity to a weak brother.

4. The higher principle.—The Apostle now lays down another law beside that of Christian liberty, viz. : “For the kingdom of God is . . . righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” In this case he applies the rule to social and fraternal relations. Righteousness is that course of action toward our brother which respects the thing which he thinks is his due; in this case respect *his* convictions, even though they do not coincide with yours. It is true the weak brother should observe the same rule toward the strong brother; but since he *is weak*, it is becoming in the strong brother to humor him, not contemptuously, but cordially and heartily. So of peace—that line of conduct which makes for the peace of all parties concerned. We

might say that God's rule of action is in these circumstances a holy compromise, even if one has to give up all points in the controversy except conscience in order to preserve peace among the brethren. So of joy, which is that holy and happy state of exaltation of mind which is present when all hearts are flowing together, borne on the broad bosom of God's love. "By such disposition the soul finds itself raised to a sphere where all sacrifices become easy and charity reigns without obstacle." This is the kingdom of God. It is not the kingdom of God doggedly to maintain our abstract rights, especially when the enjoyment of these rights is not necessary to our loyalty to God or our own salvation. Moreover, he who walks by this rule of charity is really serving Christ, is acceptable to God, and has also the approval of men, and that is better than the mere pleasure one may have in eating meat and drinking wine, lawful and pleasing as these good things are to our taste. What shall we do, then, in these circumstances? Why, certainly, there is but one answer: "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another."

II.—THE DUTY TO GOD IN THIS MATTER.

Passing from the discussion of the proposition from the point of view of duty to our weak brethren and to the Church of Christ to that of our duty to God himself, the Apostle proceeds with his exhortation.

1. Against destroying the work of God.—"For meat destroy not the work of God." The work of God is the salvation of men, even the weak ones. Let us not, therefore, for the sake of a personal gratification do anything which may tend to overthrow the faith or destroy the conscience of our brother, even though we be right and he wrong in the matter. We owe this to God, just as in verse fifteen the Apostle reminds us that we are to be very tender and charitable toward one for whom Christ died. If Christ loved him enough to die for him, we ought at least to love him enough for Christ's sake to make a little sacrifice of personal liberty in the matter of eating and drinking.

2. Good turned into evil.—"All things," says Paul again, "indeed are pure," and you may be abstractly right in using your liberty; but there may come out of an uncharitable and selfish use of an abstract right in connection with a pure thing a great evil, namely: to exercise our right and to eat and drink our "pure" things in such a manner as to give offense or work a wrong to our brother.

“It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.” These three offenses are mentioned. To make our brother “to stumble,” is to wound his feelings by conduct which he sincerely disapproves; “to offend” is to cause him to sin by being led to do that which would violate his conscience; to make him “weak” is to cause him to disregard scruples with which he is afflicted through want of a larger and more liberal faith. We are to remember that we *are* our brother’s keeper, and God will require him at our hands. It is a question entirely of charity, in which we are tender of our brother’s weakness, regardful of the whole welfare of the Church, and loyal in our service to Christ and jealous of God’s work. What are our passing privileges in comparison with all these greater things?

III.—THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER.

In the last two verses the Apostle sums up the conclusions of the whole matter.

1. In respect to the strong.—“Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God.” That is, if you are in the apprehension of Christian liberty, free to eat meat or drink wine, or any other thing of a social or a personal nature, then exercise it before God, but not under circumstances which will work wrong to others who have not your faith. Do not play the hypocrite and do things on the sly; but in what may be right and lawful for you to do at home, where you are not brought into contact with the weak, or in company with those who have like faith, please yourself; but be careful that you do not condemn yourself in the things which you allow by exercising your liberty where it may cause your brother to stumble, or offend, or become even more weak than he is, by raising scruples in his mind. If Paul would protect the weak from the liberty of the strong, in this matter he certainly protects the strong from the unwarrantable espionage of the weak, who would follow him into his own house, or anywhere else, for the purpose of asserting the sovereignty of his weakness over him.

2. In respect of the weak.—If the weak have scruples in respect of eating meat or drinking wine, or anything else, let him respect these scruples, for though it may be abstractly allowable for these things to be done, it is not allowable for them to be done in the face of a scruple of conscience. *The conscience must be respected.* “He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of

faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." This passage must not be made to apply to things which are not under discussion, as though Paul laid it down as a general principle that whatever an unconverted man does is wrong because it is not done in faith. This is to pervert Scripture. It is not wrong for an unconverted man to be moral, kind, just, generous, honest, and upright, even though he does these things in unbelief as to the Lord Christ. Yet we have heard Christian teachers say that these things were sin in unconverted men. God knows, the unconverted as well as the converted have sins enough to answer for without turning into offenses what remains of virtue there may be in them. The whole lesson needs to be studied with the greatest care, both by the "strong" and by the "weak."

XXXIX.

REVIEW OR OPTIONAL LESSON.

XL.

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL.—Romans i, 8-17.

(8) First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. (9) For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; (10) Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. (11) For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; (12) That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. (13) Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. (14) I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. (15) So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. (16) For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (17) For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.—Romans i, 8-17.

The Epistle to the Romans was written about the year A.D. 60, or twenty-eight years after the crucifixion of our Lord. It was written by Paul from Corinth. He had of course, at that time, never visited Rome, but, as he tells us in the prefatory section of the epistle, it had been for a long time his most earnest desire to do so. His letter or epistle was intended to be in some sort a substitute for his presence. The epistle is a masterpiece of didactic theology, setting forth the whole scheme of God's righteousness, and has for its object the showing forth of God's righteousness, and at the same time how through grace a sinful man may be righteous with God. Paul introduces himself in the usual way: as "a servant of Jesus, called to be an apostle," separated for the purpose of preaching the Gospel of God concerning his Son Jesus Christ, whom he declared to have been Son of man by his human descent through David, but demonstrated with power to have been the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. In this opening paragraph of salutation, he then declares his office, the sphere of his labor, and the substance of his message. Having thus, as it were, written this little private letter introducing

himself, he proceeds to state his reasons for writing, and his hopes in connection with a yet future visit to them.

I.—THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER.

The terms in which he expresses himself to the Romans demonstrates that Paul's interest in them was of no ordinary kind. This outpouring of his heart to these brethren whom he had never seen gives us a glimpse into the bigness of the Apostle's heart, and how his conscience and apostolic responsibility took in the whole world. One would have thought that the Apostle had enough on his hands to occupy all his prayers for the Corinthians, the Ephesians, the Thessalonians, and the Philippians, besides his strange and persistent care and anxiety for the church at Jerusalem, which he might readily have dismissed. Yet so great was his catholicity, so broad his Christian sympathies, that while he was laboring night and day for the poor saints at Jerusalem, the city that was ready to tear him to pieces, he was thanking God, and praying for Rome, the capital of the Gentile world, in which he was yet to close his labors and lay down his life for Christ. He was truly the world's apostle, and it is not a wonder that he has influenced the world more than any other man, living or dead, has ever done, for next to his Master he loved this poor lost and sinful world more than any other man ever did.

1. The faith of the Romans.—The first cause of his thanksgiving, and the first thing he wished to mention to them, was the fact of his thanksgiving on account of their faith; which was spoken of throughout the whole world. It is not known by whom the church at Rome was gathered, or when it was established. But it became known that there in the Imperial City there was a company of Christians, who were "a sect everywhere spoken against." The Jews resident in Rome told Paul that they knew nothing of them except *that*. Nevertheless, their faith was spread abroad over the whole world where there were Christians to hear about it and unbelievers to scoff about it. The reason for the widespread fame of their faith was not so much because it was extraordinary either in kind or degree, as because of the fact that there, at the foot of the throne of the Cæsars, in the capital of the world, a Christian church had been established and was flourishing, as it were, challenging the attention of the whole heathen world; entering the lists with ancient classical heathenism and the proudest schools of the then modern philosophies. If Paul had succeeded in establishing a church in Athens and securing the Parthenon on Mars Hill as the place of its

gathering, it would not have been so significant a fact as that in Rome itself the standard of the cross had been erected. It was the fact that at Rome "the faith" was held and declared, which had been spoken of through the whole world.

2. A solemn asseveration.—The Apostle is about to make a large declaration of his peculiar and profound interest in the Romans. He prefaces this declaration with a solemn asseveration: "For God is my witness." Of course no man could be the witness of what was in his heart, but God, whom he served with his spirit in the Gospel of his Son, knew what was in his heart. As he had given expression to his thanks through Jesus Christ by whom they believed, so now he gives expression to the depths and sincerity of his prayers for the Romans as it were under the eye of God himself. We have here at least an illustrious example of that kind of oath which appeals to God for a proof of the truthfulness of a statement made. It is a case that proves that the word of Christ, "Swear not at all," is not to be taken as covering literally every form of oath or asseveration in the name of God, but that such prohibition is only laid against the light and irreverent use of such an appeal. The Romans may have questioned the earnestness of his desire to visit and see them from the fact that so many years had elapsed and yet no visit had been made to them, though he was the "apostle of the Gentiles," and Rome was not only the chief city of the Gentiles but the very capital of the world. He explains further on that it was not because of the want of purpose or effort on his part. "I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you (but was let hitherto)." He does not say how he was hindered, but so it was. Nevertheless, the longing desire was there, and he would solemnly assure them of the fact. We are almost led to suppose that Paul had in some way been reproached by the Romans for his neglect or failure to visit them, and that he was even writing this letter to vindicate himself from that charge, and at the same time to give them by letter that help and teaching which he would fain have given them personally. We, at least, may be glad that Paul was hindered; else we would not have had this epistle, and the Church and the world could ill have spared this treasury of truth and divine teaching.

3. The Apostle's longing desire.—He proceeds to set before them the various reasons which entered into his desire to visit Rome. He declares that "without ceasing" he had made mention of them in his prayers all this time in which he had been unable to come unto them, and since he had heard of their faith. It was his constant

desire, and so he constantly held it before God, as a request that by any means he might get to them. He little knew at that time how severe and trying the means would be by which he was finally to enter into the fruition of his hopes. Violence, mobs, trials before kings and governors, chains, stripes, imprisonments covering years, shipwreck, perils by sea and land, by soldiers and civilians—all these were the means by which his prayers were answered and he at last brought to Rome. Now he states some of the reasons why he wished to come. (i) He wanted to visit the capital of the world, that is, Rome, if that were the will of God. He felt the importance of exercising his ministry there. (ii) He wanted to see them as a company of believers who were occupying a key position, and who were already distinguished for their faith and had come conspicuously before the world. (iii) He longed to impart some spiritual gift to them. Not chrismal or magical gift, but by preaching the Gospel to be the means of increasing their spiritual life, for he was sure that when he came he would “come in the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ.” (xv, 29.) He was conscious that God had endowed him with gifts and committed to him a knowledge of the Gospel which perhaps no other man at that time had. He desired to minister these gifts to them in order that they might be established in their faith and built up in their Christian life and character. (iv) To get good for himself. The Apostle was too humble a man to think that he only could communicate good to others; he knew that he needed help himself, and quite believed that a visit to the church at Rome would not only be the means of good to them, but to himself also. Indeed, this was in his thought, and he hastens to correct his first expression and free himself from the suspicion of pride or vain-glory in his ministry or gifts. “That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.” The mutual helpfulness of pastor and people is a matter too often overlooked. The modern Romish pastor scorns the idea that he could be benefited by the faith of his flock, and arrogates to himself that he only can impart gifts and help to them; and this same assumption is made by some who are not formally Romish pastors but are longing to be considered on a par with them. It would be well for them to take a lesson in humility at the feet of this greatest of the apostles, whose successors they boast themselves to be. (v) He longed also to have some fruit among the Romans even as among other Gentiles. In this desire Paul evidently addresses a wider Roman constituency than the actual church. He is thinking of the great idolatrous and unbelieving city. He remembers what fruit

God had given him in Corinth, in Ephesus, in Philippi, in Thessalonica, and elsewhere, and he longed to reap and gather into the kingdom of God fruit from Rome also. This not out of mere human ambition, but from a desire to see the souls of the Romans saved, and the glory of God increased. The human and the divine are always closely allied in our motives and desires. It could not be otherwise, and it would not be good otherwise.

II.—A GREAT DEBT.

To preach the Gospel was an unspeakable privilege to Paul. In order to do so he counted not his life dear to himself. (Acts xx, 24.) To preach the Gospel was a solemn necessity laid upon him, amounting to a woe should he fail to do it. (I. Cor. ix, 16.) But here he speaks of it as the discharging of a debt.

1. **"I am debtor."**—He, like all the rest of us, owed his salvation to Jesus Christ. He was of course brought under an everlasting obligation to him for that. (I. Cor. vi, 20.) He owed himself to Christ, and was forever his debtor. How many and various are the relations which the saved sinner sustains to Christ. To serve Christ and to spread his Gospel is not an optional service or obligation. It is imperative. Not to do so is deliberately to repudiate the highest debt a man can owe. It is, in fact, to have been put in trust with the Gospel and to have embezzled it for one's own use while depriving those for whom it was intended.

2. **To whom was he debtor?**—Both to the Greeks and the Barbarians, the wise and the unwise. In the former Paul speaks of nationalities, in the latter he speaks of men in respect of their culture. His debt was to them. That is, it was to them through Christ. He owed his all to Christ. Christ had died for all men to bring them to glory and so to save them from sin. The only way in which we may or can discharge our debt to Jesus Christ is to give ourselves in service to those whom he has bought with the price of his blood, and to whom he has sent the Gospel of their salvation.

3. **His readiness to pay the debt.**—So far as he is concerned, he is now, as he has ever been, ready to preach the Gospel to all that be in Rome, even as he had been ready and willing to discharge this debt to other Gentiles, even at the risk of his life, and at the expense of great suffering and trial. Never man, before or since, was so unwearied in his endeavors to discharge his debt to Christ. Not because he wished to be free from obligation in this respect, but because it was the only way he had of expressing his boundless love

and gratitude to him who loved him and gave himself for him, to bring him to God.

III.—NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL.

In this connection he declared that while ready to preach the Gospel as in discharge of a debt, he is not ashamed or humiliated in the doing of it. He calls it "the Gospel of Christ." In the opening sentence of his letter he speaks of being separated "unto the Gospel of God." Paul makes no difference between God and Christ in respect of the Gospel. The Gospel is in fact the good news of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Some people imagine that the Gospel is something associated rather with the love and gracious character of Christ than with the justice and righteousness of God. But such must have forgotten that it was *God* who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. The love of God goes before the work of atonement by Christ. Yes, let us rejoice that the Gospel of Christ and the Gospel of God are one and the same. "He that hath seen me," saith Christ, "hath seen the Father." "The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me."

1. Not ashamed.—This word has a double meaning, and I fancy something of both meanings was in the mind of the Apostle. (i) "I am not ashamed," in the sense of thinking myself humiliated by being the bearer of this message. I am not ashamed of the Gospel itself. There is nothing in its teaching, either from a moral, spiritual, or intellectual point of view, which causes me to blush even in the presence of all the great philosophers of Rome. I am ready, with uplifted face and open and straight eyes, to stand forth and preach the Gospel to any audience. (a) I am not ashamed of its antiquity, for it has come not from yesterday, but "according to the Scriptures." The Gospel has come according to an age-long and age-old series of promises from God, which have been spoken by the prophets from the days of Adam till now. The Gospel is no *new* thing. It was preached in the Garden of Eden and thenceforward. Christ indeed but recently appeared in the world, but he was a "lamb slain from the foundation of the world." (I. Pet. i, 18, 19, 20.) (b) Not ashamed of its Author. In contrasting the moral characters of God and Christ with all the fancied gods of the heathen, I am not ashamed to be the preacher of the Gospel of God and Christ. (c) Not ashamed of the moral and ethical code of the Gospel. There is nothing either in the Ten Commandments of God, which are the basis of all Christian ethics, or in the Sermon on the Mount, which

Jesus preached as a practical exposition of the law of Moses, to make me ashamed. I am ready to compare these two great expositions of righteousness with any of the philosophical ethical systems of Greece or Rome. And so he might have gone on alleging reasons *why* he was not ashamed. Not ashamed of the salvation which he promises and brings. Not ashamed of the gracious terms upon which it is offered. Not ashamed of its universal character and the provisions it makes for the whole world, for all nations and all conditions of men. (ii) Then there is the other sense of the word "ashamed," which carries with it the thought of not being disappointed. (As in Rom. v, 5, and Phil. i, 20.) I shall not be disappointed in the results of the Gospel. For the time being it may seem to be a contemptible power, but in spite of all the opposition, in spite of the fewness and feebleness of the Christians, it is certain to triumph. The people may rage and the kings of the earth may set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together how they may prevent the spread of the Gospel and the triumph of Christ, but God has declared his decree, and Jesus shall reign. (Ps. ii.) "Therefore nothing can discourage me in my work or in my hope."

2. "**It is the power of God.**"—This is why he was not ashamed, especially in connection with the last thought of not being disappointed. Why are you not ashamed, Paul? Why, because the Gospel is the power of God. It is not a human power, such as that of Rome, but it is the power of God. What can men or devils do to defeat the Gospel when God is the power of it and in it? It is a power, not a force, not a blind movement in nature which compels men, as the movement of the glacier on the mountain compels the rocks to give way before its irresistible force. It is the power of God—that is, the intelligent moral and spiritual power of the great, infinitely intelligent and personal God—who has ordained good to man and is able to carry out his ordination. It is the power of the mind of God over the mind of man, exercised in grace, power not in arbitrariness of mere force. It is a benevolent and not a malevolent power—the power of love and grace, exercised, not in mere sovereignty but in gracious good-will, recognizing the freedom of the will of the free moral being which God has made man. These are the elements of power which insure the triumph of the Gospel.

3. **It is unto salvation.**—This is the benevolence of the Gospel, yea, the grace of the Gospel. Did God exercise his power only in condemning sinners, no one could complain of injustice; but it has pleased God to exercise his mighty power in grace to save men. In this salvation are included two thoughts. (i) That of saving man

from sin, its guilt and destructive power, and (ii) of bringing him, through forgiveness, justification, and restoration of moral character, back to God and highest happiness.

4. "**To every one that believeth.**"—Here we have the universality of the grace of God in the provision he had made for the salvation of both Jew and Gentile. To the Jew first, not because he is more worthy or deserving, or the object of a tenderer love or of a preferred grace, but only because, in the order of revelation, the Jew has the first natural privilege. The Gospel came through the Jewish people, but was not intended to stop with them (as indeed it had not done), as witness the churches among the Gentiles, especially at Rome. The Gospel is revealed to faith, not to reason or speculation. To faith that **it** might be of grace, and not of merit; for faith is not the meritorious ground or efficient cause of salvation. It is but the instrumental condition of salvation. Faith is said to be the hand of the heart reached out to receive the gift of God. By faith here the Apostle means the simplest form of belief, and not that enlarged faith which takes in and comprehends the greater and larger mysteries and wonders of salvation.

IV.—THE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE WRATH OF GOD.

In the Gospel Paul tells us the whole counsel of God is revealed in respect of his will and his plan of dealing with man.

1. "**The righteousness of God.**"—By this expression we are not to understand here either the great moral attribute of God's nature, or the righteousness which is communicated to the believer through faith and by the Holy Spirit. It rather refers to God's plan of salvation. In the Gospel God's plan or way of saving men is revealed, namely, the way of faith, as even the Old Testament Scriptures taught, for so it is there written: "The just shall live by his faith." (Hab. ii, 4.) The soul of man makes its progress back to God by means of this salvation, revealed in the Gospel step by step; that is, from faith to faith.

2. "**The wrath of God.**"—The inevitable consequence of sin upon the persistent sinner is also revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and all ungodliness of all men, and especially against those who hold the truth in unrighteousness. By this term is meant who "hold back" the truth from operating upon the mind and heart of men to whom it is revealed. Here is a most solemn truth. God's righteousness is revealed to all men (Titus ii, 11), and

if it were allowed to have free course in our hearts and minds, it would save us. On the other hand, if we put out, as it were, our hand to hold back the truth, then the wrath of God moves toward our destruction. Mercy and Justice are both moving out toward the sinner, Mercy leading. If a sinner will not allow Mercy to work our salvation, but hold her back, then Justice steps to the front and visits the just penalties of our sin upon our souls. "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God." (Rom. xi, 22.) Let us learn that the greatest privilege and responsibility which God has accorded to man is the hearing of his Gospel, by means of which we shall either be saved or delivered over to death.

XLI.

REDEMPTION IN CHRIST.—Romans iii, 19-26.

(19) Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. (20) Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (21) But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; (22) Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference: (23) For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (24) Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: (25) Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; (26) To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.—Romans iii, 19-26.

The whole Epistle to the Romans has for its object to show forth the righteousness of God in his method of justifying sinners; or how God can be, and is, perfectly righteous and true to himself in perfect mercy and perfect justice, while at the same time he justifies or brings off the sinner free from the curse of the law and saved from all sin. This is accomplished by means of a great redemption planned by grace and executed through Jesus Christ, and made over to the sinner by means of faith: not only without law, but in such a way as to honor the law. This redemption is an absolutely free gift to man and therefore may be accepted at once, and confidently by the worst of sinners. The end of it all sets forth in glorious light the righteousness of God, and lifts man from the deepest depths of sin and moral degradation to the highest heights of God's glory.

In the first two chapters the Apostle has clearly shown that the Gentile is guilty of sin, because, though without a formal revelation of the law of God respecting righteousness, he had deliberately turned away from the knowledge of God, and transgressed in the face of and in spite of the protest of his conscience. The Jew is likewise a guilty sinner, if possible even more guilty, because to him was delivered the plain written revelation and all the oracles of God. All the descriptions of the moral turpitude of sinners which are quoted in the fore part of the chapter plainly apply to the Jew as well as to the Gentile. The Apostle therefore says that he has "before proved,"

in the first and second chapters, "both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin," and that therefore "there is no difference" in that respect in their moral standing before God. (vs. 9, 22.) If the Gentiles of old with no other lights than those of nature and conscience were declared guilty before God because of their transgression of the law as seen in these lights, then the Jews were much more guilty, because to them was given greater light. But what must be said of us, who have nature and conscience, the law and the prophets, and the Gospel? The Gentile had one talent, the Jew had two, but we have five, yea, five thousand talents of privilege and opportunity. If the condemnation of Gentile and Jew was great, ours must be damning indeed. To whom much is given of them much shall be required.

The Apostle proceeds now to set forth the relative positions of man under the law and the Gospel, and in this connection to show God's righteousness, and how it is manifested in the salvation of the sinner.

I.—THE POSITION OF MAN UNDER THE LAW.

He takes a common-sense view of the matter, and refutes some nonsense entertained and urged by the Jew. The Gentile might say that the law has nothing to say to him, because he is not under the law; but it has been shown that though to him the law of Moses was not delivered, he is still under law. The Jew takes the ground that because the law was delivered to him, he was privileged, and the law was only to be interpreted as against the Gentile; therefore he was inclined to reject the quotations from the law as applying to him, which the Apostle had just made to prove him a sinner. Obviously, says the Apostle, what the law has to say, or what is written in it, is said or spoken to them to whom it was given, whose life and polity was framed under it; and so the Jew could not escape. Indeed, he has proved that all have sinned, therefore all are under the law, for where there is no law there is no sin. (v. 13.)

1. Man is guilty.—Man's position, judged by the law, is seen to be that of a guilty creature. It is the chief mission of the law to demonstrate that. This the law does demonstrate, not as concerns the Gentile only, but also the Jew; indeed, the whole world is seen to be guilty, and every mouth is stopped. Not a word can be said to disprove or extenuate it. Not only guilty, but guilty before God. God is the highest authority, and since man is guilty before God, there can be no appeal to a higher court. The force of the

word "guilty" is, that sin is not simply a transgression of the law of righteousness, but it renders the man righteously exposed to the penalty of law. There is no law without penalty. The penalty affixed to the moral law of God is death. Therefore the whole world is by that law condemned to death—natural, spiritual, and eternal. This is the sad and awful state in which every sinner stands before God. Unless there is some way out, the penalty will be executed to the last jot and tittle and to the bitter end. This is righteous and inevitable.

2. Man is helpless.—Since man has broken the law and the condemnation of the law has passed upon all men, man is helpless. He is under that law and that law has condemned him. There is no other law. Any attempt to justify or free himself from the guilt and penalty of the law is hopeless. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." How can we escape the penalty of the law by appealing to the law which has first exposed our sin and then condemned it. There are at least three ways in which this expression, "the deeds of the law" may be understood. (i) If by the law is meant the moral law, then that law is perfect, and demands a perfect righteousness, or an exact and complete obedience from man both to God and his fellow-creature. It is obvious, then, that a sinner who has *already* failed, cannot look for justification by any deed he may do, for he has already failed. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." (Gal. iii, 10.) Beside, the law has no provision by which life may be obtained or regained under it, after it has once been forfeited by sin. Not only is this true of the moral law, but of all law. The law awards life if it is perfectly obeyed (Rom. x, 5); but it declares with equal clearness that, "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." (Gal. iii, 21.) (ii) If by the law, as some think, the ceremonial law is meant, still it is equally clear that life or righteousness cannot be obtained even by the most punctilious observances of these ceremonials. In this position the Jew counted himself righteous, but the Apostle clearly takes this false prop away from him when he says that these ceremonies, even the sacrificial ceremonies, were powerless, since they "can never . . . make the comers thereunto perfect;" "for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." (Heb. x, 1, 4.)

3. The office of the law.—The object of the law is to show man his sin, and not to take it away. "For by the law is the knowl-

edge of sin." The moral law does this by holding up its perfect precepts and its absolute demands over against man's shortcomings. The ceremonial law shows this by the constant repetition of the sacrifices. So far from taking away sin, "in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year." (Heb. x, 3.)

II.—GOD'S METHOD OF SALVATION.

Turning from the law to God's righteousness, and the hope of man in connection with that revelation, the Apostle now points out how a sinner who cannot be saved under the law may be saved by God's righteousness. We have before shown that by the expression "God's righteousness" is meant God's way of salvation without law. God's way of salvation or his righteousness is apart from law, not only the law of Moses in its moral and ceremonial aspect, but apart from all law; that is, without any help from, or under any provisions of law against sin. The sinner must turn away from all law if he would be saved. He is not to find a law of salvation in nature, in conscience, in the moral law, or by sacrifices, good works, ceremonials, or any other such thing. Though God saves without law, yet the law and the prophets—that is, all the revelation of God given by the law and the prophets—witness to the fact that God had in reserve a further revelation for man by which he might be saved. This is now "manifested" to the world through Jesus Christ. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men," Gentiles as well as Jews. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour." (Titus ii, 11; iii, 5, 6.)

1. The moving cause of our salvation.—This is declared to be the grace of God. "Being justified freely by his grace." Grace is a pure favor, without reference either to a man's merit or demerit. Here is a great fountain from which salvation flows to man. It is not only grace, but it is free grace. That is, God would have us understand that it is grace absolutely without condition, absolutely without merit on our part. A mitigated law would be grace, but it is more than that. It is without law and without meritorious condition. We are not accepted because of any good in us or any good works done by us; but just because God freely and graciously chooses to save us. We are not excluded from this salvation because of any sin in us or sins done by us. Neither human guilt nor

human righteousness enters into God's way of salvation. Let no man think that because he is better than some other man, relatively, that he has a greater claim on God's grace. On the other hand, let no man, however sinful, fear that because he is worse or more sinful than other men, relatively, that he is excluded from this gracious purpose and plan of God. For there is with God, and in his sight, in this matter "no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" in respect to the demands of God under righteous law. Therefore he has concluded all under sin, both Jew and Gentile and sinners of all degree, that he might be gracious alike unto all. (Gal. iii, 22.)

2. The meritorious ground of our salvation.—This is declared to be "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins." With this wondrous statement the Apostle John also agrees (I. John ii, 1, 2.) In this redemption God indeed sets us free from law, though he has had the utmost regard to it. "For what the law could not do" for us, because of the weakness of our flesh—that is, our failures to keep the law through weakness—God sent forth his Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us." (Rom. viii, 3, 4.) In every respect Jesus, who came in the likeness of our flesh, indeed, who took hold of us by the incarnation, and so took his place with us under the law, became the end of the law by utterly fulfilling it, both in respect to obedience to its commands and its demands. He perfectly obeyed God, and rendered perfect love to man, and then he, who knew no sin, cheerfully and gladly assumed all our sins, received them all as laid upon him, and by one offering of himself to God expiated them under the law. (Is. liii; Rom. x, 4; II. Cor. v, 19–21; Gal. iii, 13; I. Pet. i, 18–21; Heb. ix, 14; x, 10, 14.) The whole Scripture is replete with testimony as to this great method of redemption. Commonplace and trite as the statement of this truth is to us, it was like the rising of the sun upon the world which had been for centuries wrapped in midnight darkness, when Paul first began to preach it. It was the unfolding of a hidden mystery to the Jews, and a revelation of the love and glory of God to the Gentiles. It is still the coming of the light of life to sinners of every name, nation, grade, and condition, to-day.

3. The instrumental cause of our salvation.—This is said to be by faith. There is no merit in faith, as we have before pointed out. Faith is the belief of the truth of this gracious revelation, and

the cordial and glad consent to God's righteousness through the offering of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Faith sees how God has thus settled this great question for the sinner, and gladly accepts the settlement and becomes reconciled to God on this basis.

4. The universality of the provisions of grace.—Not only has God placed his righteousness—the gift of God—instrumentally within the reach of all, by making faith the means of acceptance, but he has expressly declared that this justification in Christ on account of his redemption by sacrifice or blood is “unto all and upon all who believe,” and it is in the power of all men of whatever earthly race or condition to believe. The Jew (though first in the order of the offer made) has no more right, even by grace, to the righteousness of God than the Gentile. The moral man has no more right than the greater sinner; the rich has no privilege in Christ over the poor. “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” It was this universal element in the Gospel which so enraged the Jews against Paul, who preached the Gospel to Gentiles as well as Jews, and placed them on the same equal footing with themselves, who had been accustomed to consider themselves the especial and exclusive favorites of Heaven.

5. The final cause of our salvation.—“To declare” “the righteousness of God.” Moses, when he was in the wilderness, besought God to show him his glory. This God could not do, for no man could see God's face and live. The revelation of the full glory of God could not be seen under the legal dispensation. But he caused his goodness to pass before him, in which there was a plain intimation of the glory which was contemplated and in reserve through the revelation of his righteousness in the forgiveness of sins, while at the same time the severity of the law of God against sin was still enforced. How this paradox could be explained was reserved for the time which had now come upon the world by the redemption which is in Christ. (Ex. xxxiii, 18–19; xxxiv, 6, 7.) Now we are permitted to see not only God's face and live, but in the face of God we see the glory of God. That glory is seen in the revelation of the righteousness of God in the salvation of sinners through Jesus Christ. “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John i, 14.) And again we read: “We all, with open (unveiled) face beholding as in a glass (mirror) the glory of the Lord.” “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

(II. Cor. iii, 18; iv, 6.) This great truth is expressed many times over in the New Testament. "That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness toward us, through Jesus Christ. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." (Eph. ii, 7, 8.) The highest revelation of God, that revelation in which his highest glory is seen, is in the revelation of "his righteousness for the remission of sins." The wonder of this glory is seen not alone in the forgiveness of sins, but that sins are forgiven, and yet the very justice of God is conserved as well as his mercy fully exercised. Hence we read: "To declare . . . his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

6. The forgiveness of sins which are past.—The question often arises as to how God dealt with sin before Christ came. (i) If no sinner was justified under the law, either by obedience to the moral law and because there was no provision for life under that law for the disobedient; or by ceremonial sacrifices which could not make the comers thereunto perfect; how, then, were they saved? We must believe that God exercised forbearance in respect of the sins of the past under the old dispensation. Christ was a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, but now at last manifested as a justification for his forbearance and forgiveness of past sins, which were in fact forgiven for Christ's sake, even though Christ had not yet actually come. (I. Pet. i, 18-20.) (ii) In respect of the vast heathen world, God seems to have "winked" at sin among all heathen nations. Overlooking them entirely, and allowing the world to go on in sin both without taking vengeance under the law, or showing mercy under the Gospel. I think we may venture to say that though outwardly God does not seem to have been dealing with the heathen world at all, for "the times of this ignorance God winked at" (Acts xvii, 30), yet in fact Christ, who is a propitiation not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world (I. John ii, 2, 3) as the ordained and eternally appointed sacrifice, covered their case too. In the meantime, through the forbearance of God, "in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (Acts x, 35.) This is confessedly a very difficult passage, but somehow it tells us that through Christ God did deal with the whole world, even in the past, as he does now in the present. But now that Christ is manifested and preached to the whole world, that form of forbearance is past, and he "commandeth all men everywhere to repent." (Acts xvii, 30.) "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believ-

eth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark xvi, 15, 16.) Now that Christ has come and has redeemed us by his blood, our salvation stands in him, and in him only. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (John iii, 36.)

XLII.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.—Romans v, 1-11.

(1) Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: (2) By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (3) And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; (4) And patience, experience; and experience, hope: (5) And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. (6) For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. (7) For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. (8) But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (9) Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. (10) For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. (11) And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.—Romans v, 1-11.

Among other things which characterized the preaching and writings of the Apostle Paul this was one: he was never afraid of repeating himself. In the Acts of the Apostles we have the record of many of his addresses—that is, the gist of them, given in outline. They were addressed mainly to the Jews. In all of them he set forth from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Son of God, the long-promised and longed-for Messiah. He then showed to them the significance of his death, and proclaimed his resurrection, and on the basis of this announced the kingdom of God. Now we have in this massive epistle a great theological treatise. Here also we see the unwearied repetition of his central thought. The righteousness of God, seen in the justification of the sinner through faith in the blood of Christ, who died for sinners, and by whom we are reconciled to God, and enter into peace with him. In the fourth chapter the Apostle continues to argue the proposition laid down in the third chapter, that it is not possible for a man to be justified by the works or deed of the law. In the same connection he shows the other side of his proposition, that they are justified by faith, and this he proves from an appeal to the case of Abraham the father of the faithful. He concluded that chapter by the reiteration of his central proposi-

tion that Christ "was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification."

I.—THE FRUITS OF JUSTIFICATION.

The fruits of the tree of life are very many and exceeding precious. It is as though on every branch of that tree there grew a different fruit, yet all spring from the same life, but slightly differentiated in quality and flavor by the particular branches on which they respectively hang. In this chapter we have some rich clusters growing out of justification. They are indeed but the fruit of the Spirit, only these, as it were, hang on our Lord Jesus Christ and for our eating, while those fruits of the Spirit which are mentioned in the fifth chapter of Galatians are grafted on to our own lives, and are for the refreshment of others. Christ is the vine, and we are the branches; so that we may expect much of the same fruit in the believer as we find in Christ. We have an inheritance in Christ and he has an inheritance in us. If this great grace of justification is, as it were, well rooted in the garden of our faith, we shall have the blessed fruits growing for our eating and delight ever more.

In the sixteenth verse of the first chapter, the Apostle lays down his general proposition, "The Gospel . . . of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." In the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth verses of the third chapter, he begins to open up the subject, and shows us how the righteousness of God flows to us through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, and that it comes to us in the form of justification through faith and not by the deeds of the law. Now in this chapter, taking it for granted that we who have believed have entered into justified relations with God, the Apostle bids us avail ourselves of all the advantages of that justification, some of which he enumerates.

1. Peace.—"Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God." This is an affirmation. Some render the passage, "Let us have peace with God." In one case the thought is, that the justification has been completed by the acceptance of the believer, and the first great fruit or benefit of it is now realized: "we have peace." The other thought is that justification is potentially accomplished by the delivery of Jesus Christ for our offenses and his being raised again from the dead, by which God has signified his acceptance of the settlement of the question of sin. This being the case, the Apostle urges upon those who are contemplating the work of God in Christ, at once to enter into the peace provided, and no

longer to carry on the war of sin and rebellion against God. In either case the thought is most suggestive. It is still true that both thoughts may be appropriated by the believer: Having peace with God, *let us have peace to the full; let us enter into it deeply and truly.* What is this peace with God of which the Apostle speaks? It is not the "peace of God," of which he speaks. (Phil. iv, 7.) That is subjective, and refers to our feelings. This is an objective blessing, and refers to a state of things set up by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Sin has made a breach between man and God. Sin has alienated and estranged man from God, and it has compelled God to assume under moral government an attitude of hostility to the sinner, for he "will by no means clear the guilty." As long as the controversy which God has against sinners is unsettled, there must, as it were, be a state of enmity between the sinner and God. But now that Jesus has settled that controversy by "putting away sin by the sacrifice of himself," having thereby perfectly satisfied all the righteous demands of God, there is a state of peace. Peace has been established. God no longer seeks the sinner to punish and destroy, as under the law, but to reconcile and save, as under the Gospel. Now, being justified by faith, we have this state of peace, or are related to God in peaceful wise, and not in antagonism. There is peace on God's side who made the peace and seeks the reconciliation; and there is peace on our side who accept the settlement and gladly become reconciled to God. Let us, then, enter into this peace with God heartily, wholly, and gladly, and not in any half-hearted manner.

2. Access.—This access is not in itself the blessing, but *the way* to the blessing of peace, and so it is a part of the blessing, as a doorway or hall-way in the house is a part of the house. The Apostle is not tired of retelling the story that we are "justified by faith," and that the object of our faith, and the warrant of it alike, is our Lord Jesus Christ, "by whom also we have access by faith into this grace" of justification, which secures peace. By access he means the privilege of approach, or an introduction into the privileges. We have now access to God, who occupies the whole sphere of peace, not as mere suppliants, not as sinners to plead our cause, but as those who are beloved by him. We come into his presence now as Abraham did, "the friend of God." The Apostle tells us that here in this state of peace we "stand." By which we are taught that it is a permanent relation and not a temporary one. Our standing with God is one of peace and not of disagreement and controversy. Sin once made strife and barred the way of peaceable approach into God's presence,

but Jesus Christ has settled and taken sin out of the way, and opened up a way of approach to God, and into the blessing of this privilege of justification we have come to stand, to stay, to be fixed and immovable against all shocks of the enemy; as an army shut up in a strong fort may stand a siege against any odds in numbers. The believer standing in the peace which Christ has made for us, need not be moved away from his confidence or shaken out of his position of safety, certainty, and happiness. The wicked stand in slippery places, but the believer stands on the Rock of Ages, and shall never be moved.

3. Rejoicing.—Still further, having gained this standing in peace with God, we “rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” God is working all things toward a glorious end in which he himself shall realize the highest glory of his own being, and he has appointed that all who enter with him into the kingdom of God, by the way of salvation through Christ, shall share that highest glory of his with him. This is, of course, first promised to our Lord Jesus Christ, and through him guaranteed to us. “Father, I will that they also . . . be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory (by sharing it with me).” (John xvii, 24.) Now it is the justified believer’s privilege to rejoice in this home. All our better and best things are before us, and will ultimately culminate in a joint participation with the Father and the Son in the eternal glory. This joyful anticipation of glory to come is an inexpressible boon to the believer. We can bear all things and suffer all things if we have good hope of final glory.

4. Glorifying.—Rejoicing in hope of the glory of God is not the same as glorifying. Beside, the above-named blessing, which comes to us with justification, is the power of glorifying “in tribulation also.” It has been said that the Jew glories in the law, but the Christian in the cross. Here is a spectacle which has always astonished the world. The stoic reached the highest height of human power when he manifested his ability to *bear* his tribulations with fortitude. Such an one was held in peculiar honor by the Greeks, and was supposed to be peculiarly helped by the gods. But that such should rejoice in tribulations, nay, even glory in them, as though there was positive delight and good in affliction—this was unknown to the Greeks. Well! the Christian, if he is strong in his standing, can do this. He counts it all joy when he falls into manifold trials. He knows that in God’s hands they serve to purify his faith and elevate and perfect his character; and then he knows this also, that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for

us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (II. Cor. iv, 17.) The progressive benefit of trials and tribulations in this life, when they are accepted and dealt with by faith, are pointed out by the Apostle in explanation of the reason why we glory in tribulation. (i) "Knowing that tribulation worketh patience." The word patience here means endurance, or constancy. We can only assume the reality or constancy of our faith and new relation with God after we have had trial. To the outward world the trials and sufferings and sorrows of Christians are sometimes as a satire on the profession of their hope and joy. But when tribulations come, as a storm upon a tree or a tempest upon a ship, the storm works the endurance, tends to bring into play all the graces, and to gather supply of grace from God, who hath promised help in every time of need. Besides, the effect is, to chasten our spirits, moderate our earthly desires, and make us patient in the trial, whereas formerly we would have resented it and flung ourselves into the fellowship of bitterness and irritation. (ii) "And patience experience"—that is, "approval." When trial comes to the Christian and it is patiently accepted, the result of the trial is to commend itself to our approval, for with the trial comes a ministration of grace and a fellowship with God which makes it seem to be a good rather than an evil thing. We prove, out of experience, the wisdom and love of God which sent or allowed the trial to come. The tree is strengthened by the tempest, and so is the Christian by the tempest or fire of trial. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, *afterward* it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Heb. xii, 11.) (iii) "And experience hope." The hope here is indeed the Christian's hope spoken of above, but it is that hope not as an abstract sentiment; under trial it takes body to itself and becomes a working and efficient grace in our lives. The hope of the true Christian becomes more active under trial, because the "glory of God," the goal of our hope, now seems more desirable and blessed in contrast with the tribulations which press upon us in this world. (iv) "And hope maketh not ashamed." That is, the Christian's hope under these circumstances will not be disappointed; the Christian will not be put to shame by the failure of the hope which has been first awakened by faith in Christ, and started into practical activity under stress of trial. It will give courage and confidence to the believer while the trial lasts, and in the-end will prove to have been well grounded.

II.—THE FINAL CAUSE OF CONFIDENCE.

The matter which the Apostle has in mind in connection with the hope of the Christian is this: He fancies the position of a Christian after having believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and gone through trials and tribulations, joyfully, confidently, appearing before the awful judgment-seat of God and discovering that the wrath of God is burning against him. This, says the Apostle, is an impossibility. Hope—that is, the hope of the sinner that is built on Christ and guaranteed by God's way of justification—shall not, cannot, be thus put to shame. He now proceeds to give his reason for this assurance: "Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us." The Christian's faith is indeed something objective to him—that is, the ground of his faith, that on which he builds his hope; but the Christian's life is not an unreal one built on mere objective truth. The love of God which manifested itself in the gift of Christ, and in the voluntary sacrifice which he made of himself for us, and which is demonstrated by his resurrection from the dead, is also "poured out in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us." Here is a real subjective experience corresponding with the objective fact of his love. The Holy Ghost who was active in the incarnation and in the sacrifice of Christ (as in his resurrection also) is active in making the impact of that love real and thrilling in our lives. I do not know how it is done, but the figure of "pouring out," as from one vessel into another, is suggestive. Of course this is done in connection with the faith which keeps the eye steadily fixed on what God has done for us in love to our souls, and all the circumstances under which he has wrought for us. When we are told by Jude to build up ourselves on our most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, and to keep ourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life (Jude 20, 21), it is simply a message to remind us of just what Paul is saying to us here. Their facts are the same: Faith in Jesus Christ; the presence and active energy of the Holy Ghost; the love of God, and the end eternal life. The argument is, that while contemplating the greatness of the manifestation of the love of God in Christ, the Holy Ghost will pour into our hearts, by conviction, a real sense of the truth of this great manifestation. And then further: "If these things be so; if God has so loved us, how can he leave us to disappointment at last, no matter

what afflictions and tribulations may intervene?" Let us see how the love of God is manifested to us.

1. Christ dying for sinners.—This is the general truth, but it is not the whole truth. We must consider all the circumstances in connection with this manifestation of the love of God in Christ for us. (i) The character and condition of sinners for whom Christ died: (a) "When we were yet without strength." There was no help in us at all. The love of God came to us when we were in a state of absolute helplessness. It is sometimes said that God helps those who help themselves. Napoleon's maxim was, that "Providence was on the side of the general who had the strongest legions." But this is not what God says, nor is it what God does. "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." This must be kept in mind when we are considering the love of God. (b) "For the ungodly." Here is another fact. Man was not only without strength, but he was absolutely without claim upon God. He was "ungodly"; not only "atheos," but unlike God. There was nothing in man to commend God's love. (c) "While we were yet sinners." Without strength to save ourselves or to stand against the righteous judgment of God; but "ungodly"; and in addition to that we were "sinners." Here is reason positive, why under common human conditions God should not have, or could not have been expected to interpose in our behalf. We were sinners, transgressors of his law, not recognizing either his right or our obligation to him in respect of moral conduct. (d) "We were enemies." Moreover, we were active in our hatred toward God, and in our lives tended to overthrow his government, and to wound and hurt him both in his love and name. Sin is not only an active evil to destroy the sinner, but it is an active rebellion levying war against God and righteousness.

2. The nature and condition of God's love for sinners.—Now look at the display of the love of God in the light of these facts. The Apostle draws a striking contrast between the love of God bestowed upon us and the most extraordinary examples of human love. "Scarcely for a righteous man" (one who has been strictly right in all his life toward his fellow-man) "will one die: yet peradventure" (he allows that possibly in the whole history of the world there might be found a case where) "for a good man" (a man of great benevolence of character and life) "some would" (out of deep gratitude) "even dare to die" (*i. e.*, give his life). This would be an extreme and exceptional case, a possible case at best. But now contrast such a possible case of human love with the actual manifestation of God's love to us.

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” In this word “commendeth,” the Apostle finds an argument why we should utterly believe and trust God’s love. He is commending his love to us, longing that we should believe it and accept it. God is not reluctant, but anxious in his love for us. Oh, rare love of God!

3. Christ living for sinners.—Now if the death of Christ for sinners in their various degrees of helplessness and unworthiness and active demerit should inspire us with confidence, a view of his relation to us, in that he was raised from the dead, should inspire us with his ability to save us. “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from wrath through him.” The greater includes the less. The great thing was for God to make such a sacrifice as would rescue us from sin and death, and justify us even *now*, and *here*. This has been done. The Apostle starts this chapter by this proposition. “Therefore being” (now) “justified by faith, let us have” (or, we have) “peace, access, standing, hope, and glorying.” We shall not be put to shame at last after all this has been done for us. He completes his argument by another antithesis. “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God” (or brought back to God) “by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life.” Will not God do more for reconciled sinners, his own sons, than it would be reasonable to suppose he would do for his enemies. We have seen what he has done for his enemies, we may easily count on what he will do for his sons, who have been introduced by faith in Jesus Christ into his reconciled presence, or into his presence reconciled. Then, if the former blessing has been effected for us by the death of Christ, is it not reasonable to suppose that final salvation shall be, as it were, more easily effected by his life. After all, life is more powerful than death.

4. Yet more.—The Apostle cannot be done with counting up blessings and re-affirming grounds of confidence. Therefore he adds, “And not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.” To rejoice in the hope of the glory of God is great, but to have an exultant joy in God himself is more. This we do, through Jesus Christ, who by his death and life hath brought us into reconciled and saved relations with God. The term “atonement” here means “reconciliation”; the blessing obtained *by* the death of Jesus Christ is put for the ground *on* which it was obtained. The atonement, then, is that which reconciles as well as the reconciliation itself. It is a present blessing *like* justification. “We have *now* received the reconciliation.”

XLIII.

CHRISTIAN LIVING—Romans xii, 1-15.

(1) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. (2) And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. (3) For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. (4) For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: (5) So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. (6) Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; (7) Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; (8) Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. (9) Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. (10) Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; (11) Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; (12) Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; (13) Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. (14) Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. (15) Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.—Romans xii, 1-15.

The first chapters of this epistle are devoted to the exposition of God's relations to us in grace, manifested forth in the sacrifice which he has made of himself in Jesus Christ, in order to rescue us from sin and bring us back to himself, followed by an exposition of the way of access to God for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. The present chapter opens up a new section, in which we have an exposition of our relations to God, being saved by the sacrifice of Christ, and of our duties to God in connection with the Christian society composed of those who through faith have entered into organized fellowship; and also our individual duties in respect of personal bearing one toward another in private relations. We are clearly taught in the whole chapter that the new life which God has brought to the world does not find its expression either in a ceremonial observance of ritual law, or in the abstract confession and profession of mere doctrines. Christianity is, first of all, personal reconcilia-

tion to God, accompanied with a new spiritual and heavenly life from God communicated by the Holy Ghost, and then a new individual and social life manifesting itself in all due humility and loving unselfishness toward others. This chapter, together with a few others, such as I. Cor. xiii and I. Thess. v, is a beautiful compendium of practical Christian life, and every Christian should study this matter carefully and walk in the paths so marked out. If unbelievers want to see whether Christianity is a practical, holy, and divine religion, let them study these and other like portions of God's Word, and compare them with the best practical maxims of the world, and they will see the vast superiority over the best worldly morality. "Whence have these apostles this wisdom?" might well be asked of those who doubt the divine origin of the religion of Christ.

I.—THE CHRISTIAN IN HIS RELATION TO GOD.

The Apostle is not now speaking of our reconciled relations with God. This point has been discussed in the previous chapters. But he is practically moving forward with this thought in his mind. We have seen how God, in love and grace, has interposed to save us by Jesus Christ, and how he has brought us up out of the horrible pit and delivered us from the awful bondage of sin and death, and given us life, liberty, and hope of glory. Well, then, being thus saved, "how much owest thou unto my Lord?" Not that his salvation is a bargain, or that we can pay our debt to him; but how much gratitude and service "owest thou" him for all his mercies conferred upon us so freely?

1. The Christian a sacrifice.—Under the old ritual law of the Jews there were five principal sacrifices. The whole burnt offering, which taught that man owed to God his entire life, without any reserve. In fact this sacrifice meant Entire and Unconditional Surrender to God. The meat offering, which signified Pure and Holy Walk. Then followed the peace offering, which signified Peace, Reconciliation, and Fellowship. These three were all sacrifices of a "sweet smell." In them there was no confession of sin, but the recognition of obligation, the confession of holy relationship and fellowship. The two other sacrifices were the sin offering and the trespass offering. In these there was the confession of sin. On the basis of the one, the sin of the offerer was expiated, and on the basis of the other, the recurring sins of the offerer were forgiven. Now in the forepart of this epistle, Paul has shown how Christ has become our Sin and Trespass Offering, through whom "there is no con-

demnation," and by whom we have constant access to the throne of grace for recurring sins. But the Apostle shows that Christ was also an Example of whole surrender to God, of pure and holy living before God, and of utter service to his brethren. These latter teachings concerning Christ are more fully brought out in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Having accepted the sacrifice which Christ made of himself to God for our sins, the Apostle now presses upon us the duty of offering ourselves up to God, living sacrifices, not for the putting away of sin, or the obtaining of forgiveness, but in the rendering to God, as saved and accepted men and women, that reasonable service which is our duty to him first by a pure and holy walk, and secondly by rightly recognizing our relations to each other, and discharging the duties growing out of those relations cheerfully and heartily.

2. The characteristics of the Christian sacrifice.—(i) It is first spoken of as "presenting our bodies." By the body here we are to understand the whole man. Our bodies include our souls and spirits. Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost; our bodies are the organs through which the soul and spirit manifest themselves, the instruments of service. To pretend to offer our spirits and souls to God, and withhold from him our bodies, is to make a mere pretense of consecration, and not a real offering to God. When Jesus the Eternal Son of God came into this world to do the will of God, he said: "A body hast thou prepared me." In that body Jesus perfectly served his Father. It was the instrument of service, and through it he did the work which God gave him to do. In like manner we are told that God is the Saviour of our bodies also; so that we are to serve him and glorify him with our body which is his, equally with the spirit. "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. (I. Cor. vi, 20.) (ii) This sacrifice of our body is said to be "a living sacrifice." The sacrifices presented to God under the old ceremonial law were killed, but we are to offer our bodies alive. We do not have to kill the body in order to serve God. That notion of sacrifice is false which leads men to starve and scourge the body, and otherwise impair its powers. God wants us in all the living energy of our being. He has use for the strength, the beauty, and the power of the body. We are to serve him alive and not dead. Here in India men used to commit suicide by all manner of horrible tortures, thinking thereby to please God. Christ indeed gave his body to death, bearing in it our sins upon the cross, but he was a Sacrifice for *sin*. We are to be sacrifices for *service*. He died to obtain the

redemption of the body as well as the soul of the sinner. We live to glorify God with our bodies and our spirits together. (iii) It is to be a "holy sacrifice." That is, we who are redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ are now to offer our bodies as the temples of the Holy Ghost, and therefore we are to preserve our bodies holy and in sanctification. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." (I. Cor. iii, 16, 17.)

3. The argument for the Christian sacrifice.—The Apostle adduces two reasons why we should thus present ourselves to God. (i) The first is based on "the mercies of God." This argument might be extended to all the mercies of God, and have weight with us. Mercies spiritual and mercies temporal. But without doubt the Apostle is referring to the great mercies which have come to us through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, according to all that has been said before, especially in Rom. iii and v. This is the argument of Paul in I. Cor. vi, 20, which has already been quoted. We have been bought with a price. The Apostle does not enjoin this holy and living sacrifice as under law, but he calls for it as the natural fruit of the new life which has come to us through Christ. (ii) It is "our reasonable service." Not that it is a service the duty of which is suggested by the mere reason, but a reasonable service according to common sense, the spiritual law of life and gratitude. What else can we do? What less can we in reason, or in conscience, or in love, offer to God as an expression of our gratitude. He deals with this duty, as we have said, not as a lawgiver laying down a command, but as a teacher and a brother with us in the grace of God, beseeching us. Just as he beseeches the sinner to be reconciled to God (II. Cor. v, 20), so here he beseeches the Christian to be a living sacrifice to God, since he has been reconciled. If we hearken to the first tender entreaty of love, we should heed as well this second entreaty which calls to duty according to the law of love. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?" The answer is: "Present yourself to God a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." (iii) Moreover, this sacrifice is an "acceptable" one with God. It is a wonder of grace that God should be willing to accept anything which we poor, worthless, and helpless sinners could bring; but since he has deigned to be pleased to accept anything, let us give him all. God is in a sense longing for, and I might even say, reverently, dependent on our love and service to fill up his own glory, and to satisfy his love. He finds a rest in our yielded hearts (Zeph.

iii, 17); he seeketh spiritual men to worship him (John iv, 23, 24); and he is well pleased to accept our sacrifice when we bring it to him. In this he is the Father rather than the Governor. "If, then, I be a father, where is mine honor?" How glad and happy we fathers are when we behold our sons, full of gratitude, and cheerfully and delightedly seeking in every way to please us.

4. Christian nonconformity and conformity.—These are words made common in ecclesiastical controversy. We hear of certain Christians being called "Nonconformists," who do not conform to certain legal forms and ceremonies in certain State churches, or those formed on similar bases, and which arrogate to themselves all the peculiar rights and graces of the Kingdom of God; and on the other hand, of some who turn back and conform their lives and even their thoughts to the authority of priestly societies, as being "conformists." Now all that is rubbish. But here is an object that is worthy of being *conformed to*, and another one set before us to be *transformed from*. "And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." The word here is "metamorphosed," which means changed. The same word used to describe the great change which came over the body of Christ when he was on the Holy Mount, there described as being "transfigured." Again, the same word that is used to describe the spiritual "change" that goes on in a true Christian's life who is living in communion with God. (II. Cor. iii, 18.) In order to be transformed into the image of Christ, we must first be non-conformed to this world; that is, the world that is without God. We should all be "nonconformists" in this sense. If we are not, we are not of the Father, but of the world. (I. John ii, 15.) If we continue to live, as a matter of choice, in conformity to the world, it is impossible that the Holy Spirit should conform us to the image of Christ. The object of this transfiguration from the world to God is that we may "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God," that we may demonstrate it to be true in ourselves and to others. We come to know the good will of God and the good of God's will, by conforming to it. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." The will of God comprehending his entire revelation, but especially his will in connection with Jesus Christ, is "good," "acceptable," and "perfect." We know it to be so when we come out of the world and give ourselves up to God, and, moreover, we are then able to prove that will of God to be good and true to others.

II.—THE CHRISTIAN IN HIS RELATION TO THE CHURCH.

It would almost seem that this tender entreaty of the Apostle to the Roman Christians was suggested by some haughty disorders that had crept into that noble church through pride of gifts on the one hand, and forgetfulness of the holy bond of union between God and the believer, and between brother and brother. He speaks to them now of some specific instances in which this law of conformity to the will of God may be justly and needfully applied in their own church.

1. The duty of humility.—That he may not seem himself to be a contradiction of his own doctrine, he very carefully suggests his authority as being not of and in himself. I say the truth, “through the grace given me.” That is, he would not presume to speak these plain words to them if he had not been vested with a certain authority or right by God; but he would have them all know that the gift of apostleship which was his was a pure matter of favor on God’s part, and not in any wise arising out of his merit. His first practical application of the great law of Christian sacrifice is to teach us “not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think,” but, on the contrary, to take a moderate and sober view of our position, our authority, and gifts within the church; remembering that our gifts are not of our own conferring but are from God; and that we have no more right to be proud of them than if they had been given to another. The Apostle is clearly speaking of special endowments which had been bestowed upon different persons in the church for the edification of the whole body, and not for the personal gratification of those to whom the endowments had been given. (Eph. iv, 7, 11, 12.) In order to enforce this exhortation he uses a metaphor which he had before used to the Corinthians. (I. Cor. xii, 4–12.) The different members of the body have different offices, and yet they are each in their place as necessary as the other, and all are together closely compacted into the one body, and animated by the same life and personality. It would be great folly for the different members of the body to take on airs, and pride themselves over the other members. The foot over the hand, for instance, or the eye over the mouth, each saying and acting as though it were of more importance and more honorable than the other. Now the Church of God is one body, composed of many members, and to some of the members God has given special gifts in order that the whole body may be edified.

We are at the same time members of one another, and all of us are animated by the one Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is in the humblest gift as really as in the greatest, for the possessor of the greatest gift to pride himself and be haughty toward the possessor of the humbler gift, it is to set the Holy Spirit at variance with himself, as it were. "Having, then, gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us" use them "according to the proportion of faith." Let each man do the thing in the church which he has been appointed of God to do, honoring equally with himself every other man who has been appointed to do something else, and let each man do his own work and not seek to meddle with or dictate to another brother in his sphere.

2. The exercise of gifts.—In the early days the church was much more simply constituted than it is now, and the gifts of God for the purpose of ministry much more widely distributed and exercised. The assembly of the church was more informal, and the services more popular and democratic. Now we usually have one man whom we style pastor, who exercises or monopolizes the most of the gifts, or assumes to do so, or is expected to do so by the congregation; but it was not so from the beginning. Then there were many men who seemed specially endowed to do specific things in the church. (i) The "prophet" was a man who was peculiarly gifted in teaching, by direct revelation from God. Sometimes a prophet was gifted to foretell events, but not often, and we have but few instances in the New Testament where such gifts were exercised. (ii) The "minister." This man was most likely the deacon, whose special gift and calling was to distribute the fellowship fund of the church to the poor; and certainly a man needs special gift and faith for this work. He needs great love and sympathy, and also great insight and penetration: a combination of good sense, firmness, sympathy, and charity—that is, love. (iii) The "teacher" was one who was specially gifted in unfolding truths already given to the church, as in the ancient Scriptures, explaining the meaning and applying them to the practical conduct or for the edification of the church, in setting before believers the standing and privileges which are ours in Christ. (iv) Then there were those who had gifts of "exhortation"; who could by impassioned speech or great tenderness of appeal move the church to action or fill it with consolation. Such a man was Barnabas. (v) The "giver." This was a peculiar gift. A man called upon to distribute his wealth as unto the Lord. It is to be hoped that this gift is no longer confined to a single or to an occasional individual in the church, but that it is widely diffused over all

the church to whom God has given means. In any case he was to give with simplicity—that is, with liberality and modesty; generously, but not ostentatiously. (vi) The “ruler” was he who had gifts which enabled him to take the chair at assemblies, and direct the business of the church, preserving order and directing all things for peace and prosperity. I suppose this was the “ruling elder.” He must do his work with diligence, give his whole mind and heart to the work, for it requires both to rule well. (vii) “He that showeth mercy,” I suppose was the man who was called upon by the Spirit to visit the sick and otherwise to help those who were in distress. This was to be with cheerfulness, not only heartily, but cheerily, so as to make the visit a glad as well as a helpful one, to cheer the spirit as well as to relieve the distress. All these latter gifts, especially those of beneficence and benevolence, exhortation and showing mercy, are no longer limited to particular persons, but are now or ought to be the gift of all the members of the church.

III.—THE CHRISTIAN IN HIS INDIVIDUAL RELATIONS.

In the concluding sentences of this paragraph of his letter Paul speaks to the believer in respect of the exercise of those common and universal gifts which are a part of the fruit of the Spirit. Be sincere in your love to one another. Really abhor that which is evil, and do not simply pretend to do so; or perhaps be firm and frank in refusing fellowship with evil in your brethren, and steadfast in sticking to the good and the right, however unpopular it may make you. “Be kindly affectioned to one another; . . . in honor preferring one another.” This is to exercise that gentle courtesy which so honors Christ, and goes so far to make life happy among brethren. Where this grace is in exercise, all others must certainly grow. I have heard of a certain plant that drops water upon the ground and so makes it fertile for other plants which would else die in a drought. Well, it is so with Christian courtesy. In whatever business we may have in hand, especially the Lord’s work, let our zeal not be indolent, but “fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” with our whole hearts. Out-and-outness and whole-heartedness is the idea. Rejoicing in hope, as every true Christian ought to do; be patient in trial, and go not about complaining and discouraged and down-hearted, as though God had forgotten you, or were dealing hardly with you; especially maintain and cultivate the spirit and habit of

prayer. Divide your overplus of good things with those who are in need, and keep an open house for the people of God whom occasion or business makes it necessary to travel your way. Hospitality often "entertains angels." Bless them that persecute you, and so with coals of fire burn out their anger and change it into love. And finally, be sympathetic, and take an interest in all that affects the happiness of your brethren. "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."

XLIV.

ABSTINENCE FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS.—I. Cor. viii, 1-13.

(1) Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. (2) And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. (3) But if any man love God, the same is known of him. (4) As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. (5) For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) (6) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. (7) Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. (8) But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. (9) But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. (10) For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; (11) And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? (12) But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. (13) Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.—I. Cor. viii, 1-13.

Several questions in casuistry had been propounded to the Apostle Paul by certain persons at Corinth. Perhaps the questions had been sent up formally by the church itself, in order that with his answer they might come to some amicable and brotherly conclusion in respect to the questions in controversy, much as the church at Antioch submitted their questions to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. (Acts xv.) The question was one touching the lawfulness of a Christian eating meat which had been formally dedicated to an idol. The social life of Corinth was more or less closely articulated into the religious life. The idolaters used to have feasts in their temples just as the Christians used to have love-feasts in their churches. To these idol feasts it was not infrequently the case that some Christians were invited, just as to-day Christians are not infrequently invited by their unconverted friends to a purely social feast. Then

again (chapter x), the meat of the sacrifices offered to the idols was often sold by the priests of the temples to the bazars, and from thence in turn sold to the people for food. The question was: Could a Christian without sin join in one of these feasts and eat the meat that had been formally dedicated to the idol, or could he without sin buy and eat the meat which was exposed for sale in the bazars which he knew had been offered to the idols? There were two parties to this question in the church. One was composed of those who, having attained a higher knowledge as to the truth concerning the vanity of idols, and to a larger apprehension of individual Christian liberty in those matters which were themselves indifferent, claimed that there was no sin or wrong in eating such meat or mingling in such festivities. On the other hand, there were those who, though they had eschewed idolatry and had embraced Christ, had not as yet been able to shake themselves free from the belief that the idols of the heathen were really closely related to spiritual beings, and not merely the creatures of the imagination. For such to have partaken of meat dedicated to these idols would have been an act of disloyalty to Christ, and the first step backward toward apostasy. Their consciences were dead against the practice, and some who were making this fight for conscience were being tempted to give it up, and were thus in danger of losing their new faith. They were the "weak brethren," who were not fully established in knowledge and liberty. The Apostle met this question, as he always met such questions, with frankness and clearness of spiritual perception.

I.—CONCERNING KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE.

The Apostle opens this question by first laying down two or three preliminary propositions which form a basis for further observations.

1. **A knowledge common to all.**—"We know that we all have knowledge." This declaration may refer to that which had been clearly taught by the apostles concerning the vanity of idols and the freedom of the individual believer in Christ. This had probably been quoted in the letter submitting the question in debate to Paul, by those who were contending for the privilege of partaking of the meat under the circumstances in question, in justification of their action and against the protest of the weaker brethren. It is quite true, says the Apostle; we have all been taught this truth, but some have not as yet fully grasped it, and some of you are holding this knowledge abstractly, and not in loving fellowship. Mere knowl-

edge is not a sufficient guide to us in such questions as this; nor is mere knowledge a thing to be proud of. He therefore proceeds to an analysis (or rather to an examination) of knowledge.

2. There are two kinds of knowledge.—(i) Knowledge without love. The knowledge that puffs up and inflates the mind with conceit. Mere knowledge “puffeth up,” says the Apostle; for instance, a doctrinal knowledge of God and of Christ, without an experimental knowledge of God as a personal, heavenly Father, and of Christ as a personal Saviour revealed in the heart and to the life. Such a knowledge, good in itself and as far as it goes, does not contribute to real growth or upbuilding of character. It inflates the mind, but does not build up the spiritual life. Just as an excess of water in the body causes a puffing up of the body, which is quite different from that solid growth of flesh which is the result of a healthful condition of the blood. (ii) The knowledge which is combined with love; or rather, the Apostle says, that love is a higher kind of knowledge. Some men, as we say, know God with their heads, while others know him with their hearts. In one case a man may know and yet not love God, in the other case a man may love God and yet have a very imperfect theological knowledge of him. The latter kind of knowledge serves more to build up the true life than the former. It takes hold of the affections and controls them, whereas the former kind of knowledge leaves the best part of man unaffected. The exposition of the knowledge of love is found in the thirteenth chapter of this epistle. Read it. That knowledge considers both God and our brethren, and binds us to both; whereas mere intellectual knowledge leaves us isolated and filled with pride.

3. A caution against pride.—Moreover, the Apostle tells them that no man has such an exhaustive knowledge of God, or any of the subjects connected with our relation to him, as to make us sufficient in ourselves. For at best we only know in part. Indeed, we know nothing as we ought to know it. The palace of knowledge is an ever enlarging one. We no sooner enter into one chamber than we discover a door which leads into another. We have not yet attained in this respect, nor are we already made perfect. Let us then be modest in our assertions of knowledge, and careful lest, proceeding upon a partial knowledge of things, we make a tremendous blunder. Love is in any case a surer guide than knowledge, for it has in it the instinct and germ of all knowledge and right relation. Knowledge is a dangerous borderland, and we need love to lead us by the hand while we are in it.

4. Safety in love.—If knowledge without love is dangerous, be-

cause it does not necessarily unite us to God and our brethren, love is a position of safety. "If any man love God, the same is known of him." That is, the man who loves God is brought under the immediate protection and guidance of God, and so is safe. "The Lord knoweth" (superintends and watches over) "the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish"—that is, lead him to destruction. (Ps. i, 6; see also Nahum i, 7; Matt. vii, 21-23; John x, 14; II. Tim. ii, 19.)

II.—CONCERNING GOD AND IDOLS.

The question in controversy, namely, the eating of meat, lies between our knowledge of God and idols and our relations to them. Now, what do we know of these two?

1. Concerning idols.—"We know that an idol is nothing." In itself it is nothing but a piece of stone or wood, and cannot, therefore, affect any question of right and wrong, or exercise any influence over meat to sanctify it or to mar it. As it is the representative of a fancied god, it is nothing, because at best it is only the representation of an imaginary being who has no existence in fact. Therefore it can never affect our actions one way or the other in the matter of right and wrong, and has no power either to sanctify or to defile.

2. Concerning God.—"There is none other God but one." "To us there is but one God, the Father," who is the Creator of all things, "and one Lord Jesus Christ," who is one with him in creation, and the only mediator between God and man. This is the fundamental doctrine of Christianity. (Mark xii, 29, 30; John i, 1-3; I. Tim. ii, 5, 6.) The instructed Christian must regulate his life in relation to this one only true and living God, and Jesus Christ (who is the revelation of him), and our mediator. If all understood this thoroughly and embraced it cordially, the question of eating meat offered to idols would cease to be a question, because all would understand that the "idol is nothing," and so could not enter into the question at all.

3. All have not this knowledge.—Unfortunately there are those whose knowledge is imperfect even in so fundamental a truth as this. Though converted from idols and to God by Jesus Christ, they are still under the delusion that an idol is a real being or stands for a real being. Their consciences have not been fully emancipated from the control of the old superstition, or set entirely free and made strong in the glorious liberty of Jesus Christ. Therefore for them to have anything to do with idols or things offered to idols would be

to defile their consciences; and to see others, who likewise profess the faith of Christ, going into an idol's temple and eating meat that has been offered to the idol, would scandalize them, or cause them, on the other hand, to disregard their conscientious scruples and commit themselves, through example, to an act of idolatry which was not contemplated or practiced by the brother of larger knowledge and a freer or stronger conscience. This enlarges the question and brings our weak brother into it, and must bear upon the decision of our own private action.

III.—CHRISTIAN LIBERTY AND CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

With these principles and facts laid down, the Apostle proceeds to discuss the practice of the believer under these circumstances.

1. As to eating meat.—Always true to principle, the Apostle first is careful to say (by implication) that the meat offered to an idol is not in any wise affected as to its quality. It remains the same good creature of God, whether it has been offered to an idol or not. At the same time he also clearly shows that though it is lawful to eat meat, even though offered to an idol (from the point of view just discussed), yet to eat meat is not a positive act of religion. We do not commend ourselves to God by eating meat, whether offered to an idol or not offered to idols. So, on the other hand, the mere abstinence from meat does not commend us to God. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink"—it is something more and better. It is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." That is, it is in recognizing and discharging those obligations to God and man in the relation in which we stand to them; in ordering our lives so as to make for peace in the church, and among ourselves and men generally; it is in doing those things or abstaining from doing those things which by so doing or not doing will contribute to that kind of fellowship which will insure the joys of salvation to all. As to the meat, we are neither the better for eating nor the worse for not eating.

2. Love greater than liberty.—The last remark concerning the indifference of eating or not eating meat, in which there is the clear inference that there is no wrong in so doing, might perhaps encourage those who were strong to say: "Well, since it is not wrong, we are at liberty to eat meat, and so we will. Let others abstain if they choose, but we will eat." To this Paul interposes with the caution, that though we are at liberty to eat under the law of

Christ, yet we are never at liberty to use our freedom, if by so doing we should even indirectly cause or be the occasion of a wrong to another. "For none of us liveth to himself." Love gladly considers another's good as well as its own. The strong ought always to be considerate and tender of the weak, and on no account give them an occasion to stumble and fall. Liberty is a great privilege and blessing, but love is even greater. "It is the greatest thing in the world," certainly greater than eating meat, drinking wine, enjoying a theater, participating in a dance, or playing at cards, all of which *may* in themselves (under given circumstances) be harmless, and sometimes even good. Therefore "take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling-block to them that are weak." How can the doing of a thing not wrong, and even right and good in itself, become a stumbling-block to any one? Simply because some have not attained to knowledge and strength in these things—have a conscience against them, and by example may be emboldened to do a thing which would defile or burden their conscience, or weaken its authority. Their ignorance and bondage may in this way lead them (through your knowledge and freedom) into sin, or that which would be sin to them.

3. For whom Christ died.—This is one of Paul's favorite methods of protecting the weak brother. He puts him under the shelter of Christ's sublime love. One for whom Christ died must be very precious to him, and therefore ought to be to us, for in Christ we are members one of another. This ought to be enough; but the Apostle goes further and says, that to be the occasion of such an one sinning is to sin against such an one, and to sin against such an one is to sin against Christ; for Christ does so identify himself with his people, both collectively and individually, even with the very weakest of the flock, that whatsoever is done to them, or to any one of them, is done to him. You may feel impatient with the ignorance and narrowness of your weak brother, but since Christ has embraced him and identified himself with him, your impatience is leveled at Christ, and not alone at the weak brother. "If you love me," saith Christ, "you will love and be patient and careful of this my weak but tenderly loved brother." To do otherwise is to imperil his very life, for the life is reached and saved through the conscience; to destroy the conscience, therefore, is to destroy the brother. Would you be willing to eat meat at that expense?

Besides, how unworthy a use to make of knowledge and liberty! It would be as though a weapon having been put into your hand with which to defend yourself against an enemy, you should use it

to murder a friend. To use knowledge in this fashion is not to edify either one's self or one's neighbor, but it is to destroy both; for be assured that such a misuse of liberty will certainly react on the one so using it by turning it into mere license.

4. The conclusion of the whole matter.—The strong feeling of the Apostle expressed in the preceding (12th) verse leads him to record at least for himself something almost like a vow. "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend" (that is, give him an occasion to defile his conscience and so perish), "I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." This is both strong language and a strong position. A position involving the noblest self-sacrifice. Not every one is equal to it, certainly not many do it. An eminent writer, contrasting the beginning and the ending of this section of Paul's reply says: "The strong sought the solution of the question from the standpoint of knowledge and its rights; the Apostle finds it from the standpoint of love and its obligations."

This study has evidently been suggested because of a supposed principle contained herein, which bears practically upon the great question of total abstinence from the use of intoxicants. Certainly it has such a bearing, although it must be borne in mind that the use of intoxicants is a somewhat different one from eating meat offered to idols. There is not, in the first place, the question of conscience *per se* involved in the use of wine. For the use of wine in itself is not a sin, nor is its ordinary use forbidden in any place in the Scriptures. That the abuse of this habit has come to be one of the worst evils of our times there can be no doubt. Many a believer, not weak in conscience, but in will, has been destroyed by drink—that is, by the excessive use of spirituous liquors. The question is this: "In the present circumstances, ought a believer who has no passion for drink abstain from the use of wine altogether as a means of saving his weak brother from the habit?" Certainly the answer of love would be, "If by such abstinence I could save even one man from becoming a drunkard, one man for whom Christ died, I would rather drink no more wine while the world stands." "If a weak brother becomes a drunkard through my temperance, then had I better give up my temperance and become a total abstainer." I think it is only fair, however, to consider the question as to whether the temperate and lawful use of wine is the example that makes for the intemperate and unlawful use of it. Drunkards do not become drunkards because other men are temperate. Nevertheless, the argument of love here is the great one. If even a tem-

perate use of wine leads another brother to the intemperate use of it, then love would suggest the great sacrifice of all personal liberty and right in the matter. I only say that it is not a fair inference from this principle that every man who uses wine temperately is to be held responsible for the intemperate use of it by others. If a man perceives that he cannot use wine temperately, then it is *his* duty to give it up utterly. But because he being weak finds it necessary to put himself under bonds for strength, it does not follow that he has the right to compel or demand the strong man to put himself under bonds. If one man through weakness cannot walk without crutches, it does not follow that the law of love compels all strong men to use crutches just for the purpose of keeping him company, nor would it justify him in saying, "Unless you use the crutches that are not necessary for your standing, I will throw away mine and fall crippled to the ground, and will hold you responsible for my fall." This is not charity, but bigotry and intolerance. Yet let no man boast of his strength. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Some people cannot eat strawberries without suffering a kind of poisoning. Must all therefore give up eating strawberries? Nay, rather, let the man who is poisoned by them give them up without making an arbitrary demand upon his brethren. Nevertheless, if I had a guest at my table whom I knew to be so constituted as not to be able to eat strawberries, while he has a passionate love and longing for them, I would banish strawberries from my table during the rest of my life rather than subject the brother who could not eat them to the peril involved in eating, or the severe strain of self-denial. "Let every one be fully persuaded in his own mind" in this matter, and while the strong should under given circumstances sacrifice liberty to the weak, the weak should not indulge in censure against those who have not the need of their caution. On both sides, the Apostle's urgent word, "Take heed," ought to be pondered. In any case, it is love for our brother and love for Christ that must guide us, and not the mere defense of and insistence on the right to use our liberty. Liberty must never be used at the expense of love. And close fellowship with Christ is a better rule than arbitrary enactments bearing upon particular conduct. Let us all walk by this rule, and "if in anything ye be otherwise minded," God will reveal to each one of us what our duty is in every given case, whether in respect of wine-drinking, theater-going, card-playing, dancing, or any of those questions which agitate the conscience of the Christian Church in our nineteenth century, as meats offered to idols agitated the conscience of the first-century Church.

XLV.

THE RESURRECTION.—I. Cor. xv, 12-26.

(12) Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? (13) But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: (14) And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. (15) Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. (16) For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: (17) And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. (18) Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. (19) If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. (20) But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. (21) For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. (22) For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. (23) But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. (24) Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power. (25) For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. (26) The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.—I. Cor. xv, 12-26.

We come now to the crowning glory of this great epistle, if not to the crowning glory of all the apostolic writings, especially if we consider the matter from the point of view of "the believer's hope." The resurrection, as has often been said, is the keystone in the arch of Christianity. Take that away and the whole edifice falls to the ground. This is for the reason that Christianity does not consist in, nor does it rest on, mere doctrines of life, nor upon a mere ethical code. It has a solid historical basis in the person of Jesus Christ, who was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. Not only does his deity rest for its demonstration on the fact of the resurrection; but the sufficiency of his great sacrifice to take away sins depends upon the fact of his resurrection for its guarantee; and the promise of life and immortality is only made sure by the resurrection. Indeed, we may truly say that the entire revelation of God hangs suspended upon this fact. The ancient Scriptures all pointed to the coming, the death, and the resurrection of Christ. If he be not raised from the dead these promises all fall to the ground, and the Scriptures, which we have

trusted in as the Word of God, are found to be false, for the chief things which they have promised have failed.

There had arisen some persons or a party in the church at Corinth who had denied the resurrection, not directly of Christ, but of believers, and were spreading this heresy among the people. In order to correct this deadly error, the Apostle, having disposed of the other questions submitted to him, now takes up this one, and we have to be thankful that it was ever raised, because thereby we have gotten this magnificent exposition of the great fact of the triumph of Christ over sin and death by his resurrection, and consequently the comfort and guarantee of our own hope of triumph through him. He begins his argument by reminding them of the Gospel which he had preached to them at the beginning, “how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures.” This, he says, is the Gospel which he himself had received, which he preached, which they had received, in which they were standing, and by which they were saved, unless they had received in this Gospel a mere fable, which it is if Christ be not raised from the dead. He proceeds to back up the great historical fact by producing the witnesses to it. (vs. 5-8.) Having thus called their attention to their faith and its foundation, he proceeds now to take up the question, and shows to them, first, the consequences of the denial of the resurrection; and second, the glorious things which it guarantees to believers.

I.—“IF CHRIST BE NOT RISEN.”

The particular teaching which the Apostle was called upon to refute was not that Christ had *not risen* from the dead, but that there was no resurrection in store for believers in Christ. The fact of Christ’s resurrection was not denied in the church at Corinth, directly, but the Apostle, in the very opening of the argument, shows that the denial of the resurrection to believers was the practical denial of the resurrection of Christ. “Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen.” This is his position: that the identity of Christ and all true believers is so close and real, that if resurrection is denied to the believer, it involves the denial of the resurrection of Christ himself. For to this end did Christ become incarnate and die for us, and rise again, that he might introduce into his kingdom a new race of redeemed men—spirit, soul, and body

—of whom he was the type and “first-fruits.” (v. 20.) If the denial is based on a generic impossibility, then it must apply to Christ as well as to any other man. To deny the resurrection of the dead on scriptural grounds would be likewise to deny the resurrection of Christ, for the Scriptures are alike clear in their teaching both concerning Christ and the saints. Paul insists both as to his doctrine and his facts, that Christ and all true Christians must stand or fall together in the matter of the resurrection. If the glorious promise of life and immortality brought to light in the Gospel fails in the case of the believer, it is only because it had failed in the person of Christ, in whom “all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen.” Having laid this down as fundamental to the argument, he proceeds to show what is necessarily involved in such a denial of the resurrection of Christ, for he drives straight to that point, leaving for the present the resurrection of the believer out of sight.

1. **“Then is our preaching vain.”**—It follows, says the Apostle, that if Christ be not risen, the preaching of the good news of forgiveness and life through Christ is an empty thing and a mere vanity, for it is the preaching of things which have no basis in fact, —the veriest imaginings, which have no substantial value in them. Every precious thing declared and proclaimed in the Gospel is a mere vanity if Christ be not risen, for they are all based on the fact that Christ was raised again from the dead, as, for instance: (i) Forgiveness of sins (Acts xiii, 37, 38); (ii) Justification (Rom. iv, 25); (iii) Our faith and hope in God. (I. Pet. i, 21.) The very power and energy of the Christian life depend upon the ministration of strength from on high through the mediation of Christ risen from the dead. (Rom. vi, 3–6; Heb. xiii, 20, 21.) We might greatly enlarge this list of blessings which are fundamental in the proclamation of the Gospel, but these may suffice. Now *if* none of these can be fulfilled apart from the resurrection of Christ, and so must be given up altogether, *if* Christ be not risen from the dead, what an empty and vain thing the Gospel is, to be sure!

2. **“Your faith is also vain.”**—Not only is the preaching empty vapoing concerning blessings which have no existence or foundation in fact, but your belief in them and acceptance of them is vain also. You have embraced vanities which do not exist. The forgiveness of sins is a mere fancy and not a fact; the deliverance of the soul from the guilt and curse of the law is a mere idea without reality; any hope in God is the merest delusion, for there is no ground for such hope if Christ be not risen from the dead, for who or what is to guarantee either Christ’s message or his work, if he lies a victim in

the grave and not a victor over it. To deny the resurrection of Christ is to lay the ax at the very root of the tree of promise, when it is in the flower. Every promise withers with that stroke, and of course falls to the ground without bringing forth fruit.

3. **“We are found false witnesses.”**—The third consequence of this denial is to place the apostles in the position of being false and fraudulent men. They distinctly testified to the fact of the resurrection of Christ, not as an ideal theory, not as an allegory of some truth concerning the survival of the soul after death, but to the actual and literal fact of the resurrection of the body of Christ from the grave, and his reappearance in this world after death in his entire and complete personality—body, as well as soul and spirit. Christ was not a mere spirit after his resurrection, for “a spirit hath not flesh and bones,” as these apostles saw and proved Christ to have. Here in the most positive way the Apostle declares that the resurrection was an actual fact. If it is not, then he and the rest of the apostles are perjured witnesses, for they, one and all, have testified to this effect. They were men appointed of God to bear this witness, having themselves been personally cognizant of the fact. If it is not true, then, as God’s witnesses, in the name of God, and in the interests of God, they have all entered into a conspiracy of falsehood on this point. The whole tenor of their lives is a refutation of this supposition. It is difficult to conceive of such men as Paul, John, and Peter being deliberate, premeditated, and conscious liars, devoting themselves with an unexampled consecration and enthusiasm, even at the hazard and the final cost of their lives, to foist on the faith of the people a fact which they knew to be false. To believe this is to have a faith in both human folly and human wickedness, more difficult to originate and maintain than to believe in the resurrection of Christ and all that is involved in the supernatural element in Christianity. It is folly to say that these apostles only imagined or inferred that Christ was alive from other events, or from the logical necessities of their theory of salvation; for this they distinctly repudiate, and tell us that they *saw* Christ alive from the dead with their own eyes, and *handled* him with their hands, and *heard* him speak to them face to face, and that their doctrine and the entire Gospel was founded on this fact, and not the fact evolved from their doctrine.

The sixteenth verse at first seems to be a needless repetition of the thirteenth; but it is not so. It is the restatement of a proposition in order to draw another set of conclusions. He has already shown that the denial of the resurrection involved the falseness of

apostolic teaching, the emptiness of the believer's faith, and the fraudulent character of their testimony. Now, from the same premises, he will show how fatal this denial is to the salvation of believers.

4. "**Your faith is vain.**"—This has not the same meaning as the same expression in verse fourteen. There it referred to the mental exercise of trusting, here it refers to the object of our faith. Now what is our faith? It is that Christ died for our sins—that is, his death expiated our sins, and brought in an everlasting righteousness. But if he is not raised again from the dead, it cannot be proved that his death was efficient for the putting away of sin. Either he must have died as a mere man, or else we must conclude that his sacrifice was not accepted of God. Death is the wages of sin. If he is still holden of death, it is because he is still in the power of it, and so sin is not discharged. If, as our Substitute, he was cast into the prison-house of the grave until the debt was paid, and he is still held in custody, it follows that the debt is still unpaid and the original debtors are not yet free. If Christ be not raised from the dead, we must give up all hope of forgiveness, justification, eternal life, and a blessed immortality, for all these things depend and hang upon Christ's ability to overcome sin and death, to rise from the dead, and to ascend into heaven with our entire nature redeemed and glorified. "Because I live," said Christ, "ye shall live also." Now if he does not live, or is not alive from the dead, this hope falls to the ground, for it is dependent on his life.

5. "**Ye are yet in your sins.**"—Who shall deliver you and how have you been made free from sin, if Christ has not risen? You may say, "He died for my sins," but if he is not risen, his death is not accepted. He may in death have offered the price of your redemption, but it has not been accepted, and therefore your sins are yet upon you. Now, you who deny the resurrection, place yourself in this position, that while assuming to rejoice in justification from sins you are in fact loaded with sin, and under the dreadful condemnation of the law, for the reason that your Deliverer, though he tried to deliver, has failed to break through the terrible curse of sin and rise from the dead. In other words, instead of delivering from sin, Christ has himself become hopelessly involved in the consequences of it. This is a most dreadful thought.

6. "**They also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.**"—Here is another consequence of this denial. Many of the Corinthian believers firmly believed in the redemption that is in Christ, and in the life and immortality which they supposed was

brought to life by his resurrection. How dreadful the calamity to them and to others who shall follow them to death! The antithesis is a very strong one. The believer has laid down his life in death, as in a peaceful sleep, looking for and expecting a glorious awakening; but instead of this has gone forth to perdition, being laden with the sins which he vainly supposed Christ's death had delivered him from. The “perishing” here does not mean *extinction*, but simply banishment from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power. Perished from his presence, driven forth as a leper from heaven. What an antithesis between the hope of the dying Christian and the awful realization of the delusion; for if Christ be not risen from the dead, then is the Christian's hope a delusion.

7. “**We are of all men most miserable.**”—The seventh conclusion from this denial of the resurrection of Christ is most natural. The supposition is that these deniers of the resurrection were a kind of Christian Sadducees or Stoics, who believed that there was no life beyond the grave, and that the whole end of the Gospel was to give people a hope of subjective power over sin in this world. But Paul meets this fairly and squarely, and says: “If in this life *only* we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” For Christ's sake, and in the expectation of the immortality and glory promised and guaranteed by the resurrection, we have forsaken all the lawful pleasures and comforts of this life, given up ourselves in self-sacrifice. For the sole purpose of lifting men by the Gospel to the hope and possession of the glorious immortality of Christ we have spent months and years in prison, been beaten with stripes, in hunger and reproach, and even exposed to the arena; some of our brethren have already been put to death, all of them more or less suffering persecutions, and a number of us are reserved for a martyr's death. Is there after all no forgiveness, no justification, no higher and better life, no immortality, no realization of an ultimate being with God and in his image? Are we after all to go out of the world sin-ridden and sin-cursed, and find not heaven but perdition? Surely if this is all, then we are of all men most miserable, and yet this must be the case if Christ be not risen.

II.—“BUT NOW IS CHRIST RISEN.”

From the horrible nightmare of darkness and despair which the denial of the resurrection has bred in the religious imagination of believers, the Apostle turns with a triumphant and joyous declaration of his faith and of the facts upon which his faith rests. This

hope of immortality through the resurrection of Christ from the dead, an immortality covering our whole being, he tells the Corinthians, and has told all the world and its generations for two thousand years, may be confidently relied upon for the life that now is, and that which is to come.

1. Christ is the first-fruits of them that sleep.—He is the new head of humanity. As the priest of old just before the great feast of harvest gathered a handful of corn, “a sheaf,” and laid it up before the Lord in the tabernacle, and so thanked God for the harvest of which that wave sheaf was the pledge, so Christ as the “first-fruits” of his people is already gone up on high as the pledge and guarantee of the whole resurrection harvest.

2. Concerning Adam and Christ.—The human family has had two heads. The first was Adam, who, through sin, brought in death. As we are related to him by nature, we inherit that which he has wrought. We have seen in the fact that death has passed upon all the descendants of Adam this close connection. “In Adam all die.” But in God’s infinite mercy he has set a new head over this death-doomed race. One who first demonstrated righteousness and won life from the curse, and by death expiated the sin that brought about death, and by resurrection triumphed over both sin and death; and now, being raised from the dead, has become the starting-point and hope for all men. We are related to Adam by *nature*; we come into union with Christ by *faith*. In him we have accepted the death due to our sins, and in him we have been invested with the life due to his righteousness; and so shall live with him in his resurrection glory. This is the constant doctrine of Paul and of all the apostles. “For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” For “if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” (Rom. vi, 5; viii, 11.) The qualifying “all” in this verse refers to believers only, as it is to believers that he is now writing. All died in Adam, including believers, and all believers shall rise in Christ. Later on, the Apostle also hints at the resurrection of the wicked dead, but does not discuss their standing in this connection, because he is not dealing with that question.

3. The order of events in the resurrection.—The resurrection of the dead will be in “ranks” or “cohorts.” “Every man in his own order.” (i) Christ the “first-fruits.” He is first in the order, or the first rank. Standing by himself as the bringer in of

life; making demonstration of it in his own person; and as we have again and again pointed out, making it sure to them who are in him. The time between the gathering of this "first-fruits" and the reaping of the whole harvest is an indefinite one, for the whole harvest is not yet ripened for the resurrection. The dead in Christ are safe in his guarantee (their spirits meantime being with him "in paradise." (Luke xxiii, 43; II. Cor. xii, 4; with Phil. i, 23; II. Cor. v, 6.) (ii) "Afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." The next event in the order of resurrection will be the resurrection of the sleeping saints, when "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." (I. Thess. iv, 16.) How this is accomplished Paul shows in a later part of this chapter, answering the argument on which these deniers of the resurrection of the dead depend. (vs. 17, 18.) (iii) "Then cometh the end." After the saints have all been gathered in, and safely housed in heaven, the final scene in the great tragedy of human life and redemption will take place. The Apostle does not go into detail here, but he evidently refers to the great judgment which will take place after the millennium, when "the rest of the dead" shall be raised (the wicked dead) and cast out from the presence of God. (Rev. xx, with context.) Here John points out the difference between the first and the second resurrections, and the period of time intervening between the rising of these two cohorts.

4. The mediatorial reign of Christ.—In this connection the Apostle points out that in the mean time, till the end come (after the raising of the holy dead), Christ must still reign, till all the powers of sin and death are thoroughly put down and cast out. (Rev. xx, 11-15.) When this is done Christ, the great Mediator, into whose hands all power in heaven and earth hath been given, will resign the kingdom and the power into the Father's hand, from whom he received it, and God the Father will reign over all. Just what this great change in the administration of the affairs of God's moral universe imports, it is impossible to say. It does not mean any humiliation of Christ, but rather, I fancy, that Christ takes his place as the Head of the Redeemed Race, and with them rules and reigns under the Father in glory, though now no longer in mediation. The twenty-first and twenty-second chapters of Revelation give us glimpses of this.

5. The last enemy.—Death is the last enemy to be put down. This is the final overthrow of the power of sin, so far as God's people are concerned. So long as death reigns over any one of them, the

work of Christ is not done, and the work of the devil is not destroyed. But when the last of the dead in Christ have been raised up, and seated in glory with him, then the final deliverance will have been wrought, and sin will have been vanquished forever. If the resurrection is a fable and a fiction, then all these things which enter into the hope of the believer are fictions and vanities also, and we are indeed of all men most miserable!

XLVI.

THE GRACE OF LIBERALITY.—II. Cor. viii, 1-12.

(1) Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; (2) How that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. (3) For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; (4) Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. (5) And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. (6) Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also. (7) Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. (8) I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. (9) For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. (10) And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. (11) Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. (12) For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.—II. Cor. viii, 1-12.

In the preceding chapter we have a faithful, tender, and loving communication clearing up a great scandal which had for a long time been agitating the Corinthian church, and had been the subject of a previous sharp letter from the Apostle, which had been the means of setting things right in the church. This fact, and all the struggle connected with it, had contributed much to their spiritual edification, and greatly drawn out the Apostle's love and confidence toward them in this and all things. There was now another matter which he wished very much to have them set right, and which, as the matter then stood, was in some sort another scandal, though not so glaring a one in the eyes of the world. A year before there had been an appeal made to all the Gentile churches to make a contribution toward the necessities of the poor Christians in Judea, who had been suffering great persecution and were at that time in deep poverty. This church had at first taken the matter up with great spirit, in so far as the declaration of their readiness to respond to the Apostle's

appeal was concerned; but they had lagged behind in the performance of their liberality, and the collection was still unfinished after a year. This was all the more unworthy of them because they were a comparatively rich church, and could give without impoverishing themselves. Having responded to his admonitions in the graver matter which he mentions in his last topic, he had good hope that they would now set this other matter right.

I.—THE GRACE OF GIVING.

As human society is at present constituted, as the providence of God is at present administered, and as long as the improvidence of man is a factor in the social relations of the world, and especially in the fellowship of the church, there must always remain a necessity for the well-to-do to share a portion of their surplus with the unfortunate and improvident. Benevolence and beneficence is a theme constantly dwelt upon in the Scriptures. To give a portion to them who have *nothing* is laid down as a duty before we may rightfully enjoy feasting on our own abundance. The poor, our Master told us, we always have with us, and it is our privilege to help them whensoever we will. We are bidden to work with our hands, that we “may have to give to him that needeth,” as though God’s thought was not that his people should hoard their surplus money, but use it in benevolence.

II.—THE GRACE OF GOD, TO WIT:

The Apostle distinctly speaks of giving money to help and succor the poor, as a grace. “We do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.”

1. As a movement in the human heart emanating from God.—The love of money, or covetousness, is natural to the human heart, and is not readily overcome by the natural man. To root up this sin and plant in its place the beautiful flower of beneficence, the grace of God is necessary. There is a good deal of giving in this world which is only a form of selfishness, as our Lord has clearly taught us in connection with what he says of loving those who love us, giving to those who give to us, doing good to those who do good to us, etc. (Luke vi, 32–34.) But to give to those who have need, because the love of Christ constraineth us, without hope of return, is a pure grace from God.

2. As it does not take into account the unworthiness of its

object.—In the passage just quoted our Master tells us to be merciful, and not strictly just. Grace and mercy are dispositions which in a peculiar way consider only the need of their object, and not their merit. If we never gave except to those who were strictly meritorious, our charities would be very limited. What would *we* do if God's saving gifts were confined to the meritorious? Surely you and I would never be saved! Grace is unmerited favor, and not the reward of merit. Therefore true benevolence is grace, springing from a motive of love in the giver, and not from a consideration of the abstract claims of the object.

3. As it is a benefit to those who give, as well as to those who receive.—The grace of God flows out through our beneficence to those who receive our benefactions, but not less to us who bestow them. "It is" (even) "more blessed to give than to receive." So that when the Apostle spoke of the "grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia," he not only alluded to their generous gifts to the poor saints at Jerusalem, but the spiritual riches which had come to them from God, both as an inspiration and a residuum. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth . . . but it tendeth to poverty." Many a rich man is miserably poor because he withholds his hand from giving.

4.—As it is such a beautiful grace.—Nothing is more Godlike than to give to those who have need. That which has charmed and fascinated the ages with Jesus is that his whole life was one of self-sacrifice for others. He came not to be ministered to but to minister. A very poor little child was once so overwhelmed with the unsolicited kindness of a lady, who, having heard of the sickness and destitution of their household, sought them out, and loaded them with benefits, that she looked up into her face with an amazed expression and said: "Please, ma'am, are you God's wife?" In this sense every Christian should be the bride of Christ.

III.—THE LIBERALITY OF THE MACEDONIANS.

Having spoken of the Macedonian churches, namely, those of Thessalonica, Berea, and Philippi, he proceeds to give in detail some account of what they had done, and how they had done it, and thus seeks to stir up the Corinthians to a similar spirit of generous Christian liberality and benevolence. Paul displays much tact, as he always does, in the handling of this subject, and demonstrates the lawfulness of seeking by emulation to inspire unto good works. Concerning the beneficence of the Macedonians he points out the following facts:

1. It was abundant.—"It abounded unto riches." Perhaps the combined gifts of the three churches in Macedonia would not amount to more than a moderate collection which might be taken from the one church at Corinth; but the circumstances under which it was given made it the very riches of liberality. In the first place the Macedonians had, through persecution, suffered great loss in property and possessions. Like the churches in Judea, their loyalty to Christ had cost them their worldly possessions. Nevertheless they gave. The Apostle speaks of "a great trial of affliction," and "their deep poverty." In such circumstances most churches and men would hold themselves excused from making contributions; many would rather plead that they themselves needed help from others. But here was an exhibition of "the grace of God bestowed on these churches," that their joy in God was so great, "the abundance of their joy" led them, even out of "their deep poverty," to abound "unto the riches of their liberality." That is, their gifts were not only astonishingly large, considering their circumstances, but were given with such hearty simplicity and unaffected love and gladness, that the casket, so to speak, in which they presented their gift was worth more than the gift itself. There are those who out of great wealth give a small amount grudgingly and with a sour spirit, but these out of deep poverty gave liberally with a gladness and cheerfulness that made their gift doubly valuable.

2. It was according to ability.—Nay, in their case it even went beyond all lawful or reasonable expectation. "For to their power, . . . yea, and beyond their power," they gave. Like the widow who gave her two mites, they gave beyond their ability to give. The widow would have been a great giver if she had given but one of her two mites, but she went beyond "her power" when she put them both in the treasury, even to the extent of her "whole living." Something like this spirit animated these Macedonians. There is another thought here. "They were willing of themselves." It was spontaneous on their part. They did not have to be urged to give. As soon as they heard of the suffering and need of the Judean Christians, they volunteered their benevolence. Perhaps their own afflictions and their own poverty made them more keenly alive to the need of others. As a rule those who have suffered need themselves are more ready to succor the needy than those who have never known want. As a rule, also, the poor are much more liberal in gifts than the rich. Riches breeds indulgence, and self-indulgence in turn breeds selfishness.

3. It was urgent and loving.—In further illustration of this,

the Apostle tells the Corinthians that instead of waiting to be importuned, they prayed "us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints." So great was their liberality that the apostles were at first reluctant to take it, knowing how poor they were; but so great was their love and sympathy for their poor brethren, poorer perhaps than themselves, at least their love suggested this, that with urgent entreaty they persuaded Paul and his companions to receive and distribute their gifts. It is possible that the reluctance of the Apostle was owing somewhat to a hesitancy to have this money trust, lest some might take advantage of it and accuse him of receiving and appropriating it to himself. There were those who had accused the Apostle of making money out of his ministry, as in all ages malicious people have taken delight in making similar charges against less worthy and unselfish ministers.

4. Their liberality sprung from their consecration.—"They first gave their own selves to the Lord." Paul had hoped to get something from *them*, but he was astonished and delighted to see how deeply and truly they appreciated their relation to God and to the brethren, in respect of the whole matter. Naturally they might have held back from giving in their circumstances; and they realized that if they gave at all they must do it as unto the Lord. Consecrated as they already were, they made a fresh consecration of their own selves, which carried with it all their possessions. In this spirit, to give to the poor saints was the same thing as giving to the Lord himself; and what would they not give to him who had died for them, giving himself for their salvation. Like the lad with the five loaves and the two fishes, they first brought what they had to give to the Lord for his blessing, and the basket in which they brought their little supply was their own selves. Here is the true secret of liberality, and here is the high power of small gifts, made large in the hands of him who can multiply all gifts by dividing them. Thus giving, a little becomes much. Thus giving, no one need be slack in giving a little, because they cannot give much.

5. Their benevolence stirred up hope for others.—When Paul saw this noble generosity on the part of these poor Macedonians, it filled him with hope that the rich Corinthians might be animated by the same spirit, and that would lead to a large supply for the poor saints at Jerusalem. When we see great grace in one Christian, it inspires us with hope that we may look for it in another. So Paul, who had begun to despair of the collection which had so long "hung fire" in Corinth, now began to hope that it might at last

be forthcoming. Acting upon this new-born hope or this hope revived, he at once determined to send Titus back to Corinth to make a further effort there. Every one of us lives not only in ourself but also in our example, either for good or for evil. In that their example stimulated others to give, the Macedonians increased their own gifts. Thus out of their deep poverty the riches of their liberality abounded.

IV.—AN URGENT APPEAL.

The sensitiveness of the Apostle had led him to drop the matter of the collection from the church at Corinth; for he had undertaken this help for his countrymen without express commandment from God, and he naturally hesitated to urge an unwilling gift from the Corinthians; but the unexpected liberality, together with the great joy manifested by these other Gentiles, encouraged him to hope for the same spirit in the Corinthians, so that, turning again to them, he made an urgent appeal.

1. "This grace also."—The Apostle's appeal had more in it than a plea for money. He saw in this collection which he was now urging an opportunity of developing the spiritual life of the Corinthian church and rounding them out in a direction that they greatly needed. The church at Corinth was not only a wealthy church in the matter of money, but it was rich in many other ways. Its members seem to have been of more than average ability by nature, and God had bestowed upon them rich spiritual gifts. The Apostle appeals to this fact, and delicately compliments them on their many good gifts and possessions, and thereby urges them to an equalization of their gifts by bringing up one which was lagging behind. The Corinthians were rich in *faith*. They had grasped the great facts of the Gospel, and they heartily stood in this faith. They had many among them who were gifted as *speakers*. Nor were any of them backward in "utterance." They did not hide their light under a bushel, but let it shine out, at least as far as an outspoken testimony to the power of the Gospel was concerned. They had *knowledge*; having been well instructed by both Paul and the eloquent Apollos, who was mighty in the Scriptures, and they had improved their opportunities in this respect. Nor were they lacking in *diligence*. They were an active and aggressive church, spreading the faith of the Gospel and lengthening the cords of their tent, and strengthening its stakes. They were not slack in the expression and manifestation of their *love* for their ministers. Paul, though he would not receive money from them, had experienced great kindness

at their hands, and so no doubt had other ministers of theirs, both of their own number and those who had visited them from abroad. There was, however, this one thing that they lacked. They were not generous and ready with their money in matters of benevolence. Now, says the Apostle, "See that ye abound in this grace also." It would be a pity that so grand a church should be marred by meanness in this respect. Their illiberality was the fly in the ointment; the spot and blemish on their beauty; the point of weakness in their general strength. How often a fine character is marred by one grave and glaring fault. Paul's plea was for themselves as much as for the poor saints. As it was with him and the Philippians, he desired fruit that might abound to their account, as well as that good accrue to the Jerusalem saints. (Phil. iv, 17.)

2. Benevolence a test of sincerity.—"To prove the sincerity of your love." A year ago when the matter was first presented to them, they professed to be greatly interested in the poor saints, and declared their love for them; but they had not acted. The Apostle now reminds them of a principle which James beautifully puts in his epistle: "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" (James ii, 15, 16.) John puts the same truth in other words: "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (I. John iii, 17.) "You have professed to be full of pity and compassion for the suffering saints in Jerusalem, but as yet you have done nothing to relieve their distress; is not the sincerity of your love impeached?" He does not urge that he has a command from God in this matter, but he reminds them of the spontaneous generosity of others, and with a view to prove the sincerity of their professions of love. He does not actually doubt it, but they are through neglect in danger of bringing this reproach upon themselves, and he would save them from such a shame.

3. The divine example.—He further stimulates them by an appeal to what they knew of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." This is so beautiful a statement of a fact patent to every Christian, that any word looking toward illustrating or explaining it would only mar it. Who does not know how the Lord laid aside all the wealth of his glory and sunk himself into the poverty of our sin and wretchedness in order that we might in the

end share in his glorious riches; in the mean time bestowing upon us all the present riches of salvation. Let Christ's example in this respect be your inspiration and guide.

4. A bit of advice.—Paul had before (v. 8) distinctly declared that he did not press this charity upon them as a matter of commandment, but one of love and Christian fellowship, and as a means of proving their sincerity. He returns to the same position now after the digression in verse nine and gives them a bit of advice, which he certainly was entitled to do. It was good advice for them, and they would do well, considering all things, to follow it, both for the love of Christ and for the sake of their own consistency of character and profession. This is the word of advice. A year ago they had expressed a willingness to take this matter up, and had indeed begun to gather some money; but for some cause, in the mean time, they had let the matter drop, and nothing had been done or was even now *being* done. This was both wrong and unworthy of them. He therefore recommends them (i) to promptly perform the doing of the thing they had set their hands to do, all the more because (ii) they had expressed their readiness to do it. Had they at the outset declared their disinclination to help the saints at Jerusalem, we may be sure that without commandment Paul would not have now pressed them or ever spoken to them about it again; but inasmuch as they had been forward to undertake it, he recommends that their performance be equal to their promise.

5. The true measure of liberality.—In urging them to beneficence, Paul states the principle on which it should be regulated and by which God accepted it. It is not so much the amount which one gives that indicates benevolence, as the amount in proportion to what one has to give. (i) One should never give or promise to give what one has not to give. Sometimes under an impulse Christians promise to give more than they are able to pay, or give, as it were, what they have not. Paul says that giving must be “out of that which ye have.” (ii) He lays down this proposition: “For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.” It will be seen here that the first essential to benevolence is (a) a willing mind. “God loveth a cheerful giver,” and he does not love or accept a grudging gift, or one that comes out of a man's hand by constraint, and not of free will. Sometimes money is squeezed out of men, or given under pressure, which spoils the whole gift and renders it a service of no grace either to the recipient or to the giver. Such gifts are void in heaven. (b) It is essential that a gift be accepted before it is com-

pleted. Now our gifts may be accepted of men while they are rejected of God. A good deal of grudging money finds its way into the church's treasury and the poor fund; a good deal of dirty money finds its way there likewise; it is used for church purposes and for charity, but it is never accepted of God. If we would only remember that our gifts to men or religion are graces according as God accepts them, and not according as the newspaper records them, it might effect a good deal of beneficence. Then, should we always remember that God looks not at the amount given, but at the spirit in which it is given and to the proportion according to ability, a false pride would not keep some of God's people from making small gifts out of such as they have. God does not ask for what we have not. Let us see to it that we abound in this grace also.

XLVII.

IMITATION OF CHRIST.—Ephesians iv, 20–32.

(20) But ye have not so learned Christ; (21) If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: (22) That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; (23) And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; (24) And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (25) Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. (26) Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: (27) Neither give place to the devil. (28) Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. (29) Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. (30) And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. (31) Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: (32) And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.—Ephesians iv, 20–32.

The Epistle to the Ephesians is written on a high key. There is an exaltation of doctrinal statement, an implication of high Christian experience in this letter found in no other of the epistles of Paul. If the city of Ephesus had sunk lower than other Greek cities by reason of the grossness of her superstitions and the degradation of the moral life gendered by the worship of the great Diana, then the Christian faith and life had in a sense to be raised higher than in other cities, that the difference between Christ and Diana might be more apparent in the different lives of the idolaters and the Christians. Here the Christian calling is majestically set forth. In Christ the believer has “redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace”; in him we are “chosen,” “predestinated,” “accepted,” having “obtained an inheritance,” “sealed with the Holy Spirit,” and “made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ,” “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come,” where Christ has been exalted already through the resurrection from the dead. It follows naturally that the earthly life of the believer must be in accordance with

this high calling. The life of the Gentile is described in verses seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen, immediately preceding the portion selected for our study. Their walk is in the vanity of the mind, with their understandings darkened, their lives alienated from God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness or hardness of their hearts. All this had come upon them through deliberately turning away from such light as they had, and as deliberately shutting their eyes to the truth, which they held in unrighteousness. Being past feeling, they had given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. This life was the practical outcome of heathenism. In contrast with such a state of mind, and such an outward walk, the Apostle sets Christ before his disciples and shows them what is the true logic of faith in him.

I.—CHRIST, THE CHRISTIAN'S LESSON.

“But ye have not so learned Christ.” That is, your knowledge of Christ does not lead up (or down) to such a life as that. The first thought we have in this passage is that Christ is the Christian's lesson, and following that is the corollary: that Christ is the Christian's walk. Christian life consists in first learning and then doing the thing we have learned. There is no doctrine in Christianity that must not in some way be translated into life. Christ is the source of life, and he becomes the substance of it. The life that we now live, we “live by the faith of the Son of God.” And then it follows that “for me to live is Christ.”

Learning Christ.—This statement does not mean that we have learned a lesson in doctrines or ethics being taught by Christ, but that Christ himself is the lesson which believers learn; just as the apostles did not preach about Christ, but preached Christ himself. It is not, “ye have not so learned *of* Christ,” though that also is true. It might give a truer idea to say that “ye have not so absorbed Christ,” or taken Christ into your life, as to become one with him. The term Christ in this verse is in contrast with the name Jesus in the following one. “Christ” designates him as the Anointed Messiah, the great divinely appointed and anointed Prophet, Priest, and King of his people. In these various offices we have come to learn how in Christ we have the redemption in which is the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace. In the Epistle to the Hebrews the Apostle says: “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.” (Heb. iii, 1.) Christ is our

great prophet, and has taught us the deep things of God, himself being the substance of his teachings. Christ is our great High Priest, having offered up himself once for all for the putting away of our sins forever. Christ is our glorious King, with all power to keep and defend us in the possession of the heavenly kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy of the Holy Ghost into which he has brought us. Happy the believer who has learned Christ so, in his glorious person and offices. The Apostle says that we have thus learned Christ only if we have heard him and been taught by him. It is not enough that we have heard *of* Christ and been taught *about* him. This indeed is important and necessary. This indeed is being done constantly by all the preachers and teachers of the Word. But if our knowledge of Christ only stands in a doctrinal knowledge heard at the lips of human teachers, it will not serve to bring us out of darkness into light, and from the power of Satan unto God. "If so be that ye have heard *him*"—that is, if Christ himself has spoken to your soul inwardly by his own Spirit, so that while you have been reading the written Word or hearing the teaching of the preacher, you have been conscious of the presence of another Teacher, making the words which have come to you to be very Spirit and life. To hear Christ thus himself speaking to one's soul is to be "taught by him" or "in" him; for all true spiritual teaching shows us how all the lessons of God to the soul tend to unite the soul with Christ. We are taught by him, and being so taught we find ourselves becoming one with him, as the branch is "in" the vine and one with the vine. The thought altogether is that the Christian walk can only be counted on or looked for in the lives of those professors who have a real life in Christ. "As the truth is in Jesus." Here we have our attention called, not to the great offices of the Christ, but to the man Jesus, in whom these great offices were revealed and set forth. The truth concerning them is not abstract truth, but truth "in Jesus." "As the truth is in Jesus." "What is truth?" asked Pilate. Jesus tells us: "I am the truth." No truth apart from Christ is saving truth. One may believe in the forgiveness of sins, in regeneration, in the resurrection of the body, and in the life everlasting, as so many doctrines; but unless they see that Jesus is the substance of them all and grasp the truth "in him," it is mere empty knowledge, and while it may serve to puff up the possessor with orthodox pride it will neither save nor sanctify the life.

II.—THE PRACTICAL OUTCOME OF THE LESSON.

The Apostle proceeds now to show what the result in the life is of so learning Christ. Every seed brings forth after its kind; and if Christ, the living and eternal Word of God—the begetting seed,—is really sown in our hearts, it will bring about a result such as is described, first in general, and then in detail, in the following verses. It is an illustration of what Paul means elsewhere when he says, “for me to live is Christ.” (Phil. i, 21.)

1. The Christian life in general.—The Apostle sets forth under a figure the general effect upon the life of having learned Christ and been taught in him.

(i) *The old man.* The old man is that manifestation of the sinful nature which is common to all men before they come to Christ; that body of sinful propensities and inclinations which leads to the walk of the Gentiles. He speaks of the same thing when he says elsewhere: “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; . . . in the which ye also walked sometime, when ye lived in them.” (Col. iii, 5–7.) He speaks concerning their “former conversation,” which is a term descriptive not only of speech, but of the whole habit of the life, which he declares to have been corrupt. Peter also speaks of this old life, when he says we were “redeemed . . . from our vain conversation received by tradition” (inheritance) “from our fathers.” (I. Pet. i, 18.) This habit of life and disposition of mind Paul calls the old man, the corrupted nature or disposition received by inheritance from Adam. He calls it “corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.” This life is so vile when it is fully lived out, that it is as though it were a man walking through life leprous and rotten with disease—a disease brought about by the gratifications of the lusts of man’s lower nature, fired and energized by deceit. For the gratification of sinful lusts always ends in deceiving the sinner. They promise pleasure without harm, and though they may give momentary gratification, they end in deadly harm. This old man, this body of disease and death, is not properly a part of our original human nature, which was made in the image of God. It is that fungus growth of sin which has fastened on our proper humanity, feeds upon it, and poisons it. Sin in this respect is a foul cancer, which Christ came to eradicate by the power of his own life. He has, in fact, dealt a deadly blow to this old man in every soul who has “learned him” as Prophet, Priest, and King. The “old man” is now a decaying

and putrid corpse in every believer—a vile thing, to be put off and cast out of the life. It hangs about the regenerated man as an old and worn-out garment, vile with dirt and ragged with much evil use. It is a thing to be laid aside. In this the believer must be active. God has by regeneration separated the old man vitally from our humanity, but he calls upon us in the energy of his grace to “put it off.” Salvation is an intelligent matter, in which all the faculties of our personality are to be brought into play.

(ii) *The renewed mind.* “And be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” He calls attention to the fact that in Christ God has given us a new mind. It is in the energy of this renewed mind that we are to work, both in putting off the old man and in putting on the new man. When health comes to a diseased skin, a new or young and healthy skin appears in the place of the old diseased skin. It is the coming into our lives of this new man or “young skin” which crowds off the old man. When Naaman the leper was healed, we are told that his flesh became again as a little child’s—young, soft, and pure. While this new and young mind of the new-born child of God is appearing, it is for us to hasten the process of outward and visible salvation, by scaling off the old man. It would be hopeless to try and cure a leprosy by picking away at its outward festers; but if underneath there is a flow of health and the coming of a new skin, then we may hasten the outward cure by peeling off the corrupt, diseased, and dead skin. The whole figure is bold and suggestive. If we will hasten the process of getting rid of the old man, let us be careful to cultivate the spirit of our mind in the power of Christ’s life.

(iii) *The new man.* “And that ye put on the new man.” If we are careful to put off the old man we must likewise be careful to put on the new man, “which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” This new man is in contrast with the old man—the moral image of one in contrast with the moral image of the other. The old man is corrupt through deceitful lusts. The new man is created after (the image of) God, in “righteousness and true holiness.” This new man is not an evolution out of and *from* the old, but it is a creation by the hand of God. “If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation” (“he is a new creature”). (II. Cor. v, 17.) The Christian life is not a mere reformed sinful life, it is a life begotten within us by the Holy Spirit through the incorruptible word of God. (James i, 18–21.) It is that new birth of which Jesus spake to Nicodemus, saying, that “except a man be born again” (that is, from above) “he cannot see” (or enter into) “the kingdom

of God." (John iii, 1-5.) In this new man there is "power to become the sons of God." (John i, 12.) That is, along with the new birth comes a spiritual energy as well as a holy disposition, which enables the new-born soul to rise up and assert itself against the old man and cast it off. The failures in Christian life are not due to lack of power, but to the failure to use the power that is in us. How often we read of the grace of God working in and for us "according to the power that worketh in us." (Eph. iii, 20.) The new man is created in righteousness. God not only restores us to righteous standing by the work of Christ *for* us on the cross, but he communicates a real righteousness *in us* by the work of the Holy Spirit *in* the "new creation." It follows, therefore, that there will be "true holiness" in the manifestation of the new man. By true holiness is meant a real spiritual holiness, in distinction from a mere outward reformation and the ceremonial holiness seen in attention to ordinances and ceremonies.

2. The Christian life in detail.—Having bidden us to put off the old man and put on the new, the Apostle now proceeds to show us by concrete teaching in what the old man consists and in what the new man consists. The Christian does not have to work in the dark, nor is he left to the dim light of his own conscience to tell him what belongs to the old and what to the new man. He does not speak of all the characteristics of either man, but of enough to enable us to begin the work vigorously; no doubt well knowing that as we go on to know the Lord the entire moral features of both men will be revealed. These are some of the characteristics of the old man, over against which he sets those of the new, and urges us that while with one hand we put off the old, with the other immediately to put on the new. The soul must be clothed with new and good works as we strip it of its old and foul ones.

(i) *Falsehood.* "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor." This lying, though it may properly include all misstatement of fact, all misrepresentation, all exaggeration, deals especially with that kind of lying which especially characterized the heathen in Paul's day, and is as characteristic of heathen nations of this day—the lying which seeks to deceive in trade and personal relations. Here in India it is the rule never to believe anything which an unconverted native tells you; and one of the worst faults of the native Christian is that he is still in bondage to this dreadful habit. Put it away. Lay it aside as a deceitful lust, a false, wicked, and destructive habit; and let your words be words of truth with your neighbor, "for we are members one of another."

Christianity has brought with it that "brotherhood of man" which the heathen knew nothing about. To lie to one's neighbor, and especially to one's brother, is to lie to one's self. To hurt your neighbor is to aim a blow at yourself. His rights should be as sacred as your own in your eyes.

(ii) *Anger*. "Be ye angry and sin not." Anger is not in itself a manifestation of the old man, but anger with sin is. Jesus was angry, but he was only angry without sin. If we shall be angry only as he was angry, without sin, then our anger will not be sin. But anger is a dangerous passion. If it is held on to and cherished, it will become a personal matter, in which jealousy for God and the right will go out of it and personal pique and sense of personal wrong will come in, and breed hatred, malice, and revenge. These are deadly sins. Therefore, whatever the cause or occasion of our anger, "let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Wrath may flame up, but we must not allow it to live over-night. Surrender both your anger and your wrath to God. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." Whatever the wrong, whether it be to us or to another, God can right it better than we. Paul adds a caution here to this effect. "Neither give place to the devil." A state of anger is a perilous one in more respects than one. It opens the door of the soul to the devil. He will be quick to take possession if we do not make short work with anger and wrath. How many victories the devil has had over us, just because we were angry and sinned, and laid up our wrath over-night and began with it afresh the next day!

(iii) *Dishonesty*. "Let him that stole steal no more." Thievery was a common sin with the heathen. The desire to provide for one's necessities not by honest labor but by preying upon our neighbors' goods and industry, is not uncommon in Christian countries. Thievery is not confined to burglary or even larceny. It is practiced by many men in trade, by misrepresentations, false marks, false weights and measures, adulteration of goods, etc. All this is stealing. Let it cease in every form among Christians. Give the heathen and other children of the devil the monopoly of this kind of business. Let us labor with our own hands, or practice perfect honesty in our trades and callings, not alone that we may have, but that we "may have to give to him that needeth." There are always some persons in need, worthy persons, whom sickness and misfortune have for the time being rendered indigent. With our surplus earnings and savings it is a joy (or ought to be) to the new man to distribute "to the necessity of saints."

(iv) *Foulness of speech.* This is also one of the commonest characteristics of the old man. Unclean thinking leads to unclean speech. An unclean heart, like an unclean and foul fountain, sends forth unclean waters of speech. This foulness may justly refer not only to foul and filthy speech and unchaste allusions, but to slander and backbiting and general scandal-mongering. The opposite to this in the new man is such speech and conversation as tends to edification of the speaker and is a minister of grace to the hearer. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another." (Col. iii, 16.) Solomon tells us that the speech of the righteous is a well of life. (Prov. x, 11.) Cultivate this kind of conversation. Surely there is enough in the new world of righteousness to afford profitable subjects of conversation. Nothing so quickly betrays the quality of a man's life as the general tenor of his conversation.

3. On grieving the Holy Spirit.—Having mentioned the above four cardinal sins of the old man, the Apostle adds an injunction against grieving the Holy Spirit of God, as though the indulgence of such things were a grief to him, as any evil practiced by a child is a grief to these who love him. The Holy Spirit bears such a personal relation to us that our actions "grieve" him. None but a friend can grieve a friend. The Holy Spirit of God is our friend, deeply interested in our welfare. He is the "Holy" Spirit of God, and all offenses against holiness done by the children of God are a grief to his holy nature. Besides, he it is who seals us unto the day of redemption. The indulgence of the sins mentioned above and the absence of the virtues spoken of in antithesis must arrest the progress of the work of "sealing," and so we add injury, perhaps fatal injury, to ourselves, as well as grief to the Holy Spirit of God, by not taking heed to the lesson we have learned in Christ.

4. A final injunction.—As if to gather up what remained of the old man, the Apostle adds that "all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." These are all distinctly of the old man, and utterly inconsistent with the growth of the new man. Instead of these the Apostle adds the following new-man characteristics to be cultivated or put on. (i) *Kindness one to another.* Kindness is gentleness in bearing with wrong. (Luke vi, 35; Rom. xi, 22; Eph. ii, 7; I. Pet. ii, 3.) (ii) *Tender-heartedness.* This is a more active manifestation of warm-hearted sympathy and love. (I. Pet. iii, 8.) (iii) "*Forgiving one another.*" There are constantly arising between brethren, while we are yet imperfect, offenses more or less grievous

to be borne, which excite resentment, or at least make deep wounds. Well, in the spirit of the renewed mind, we must practice forgiveness; that is, put all sense of wrong and all feeling of offense out of our hearts. The motive urged is, that as Christ has done all this for us in the matter of our sins against God, so we ought to be Christ-like in our bearing toward our brethren. This is the only rule we dare follow in all personal matters. Indeed, it is the great and golden rule of the Christian life, to act in every case that comes up as we think Christ would have acted in similar circumstances.

XLVIII.

THE CHRISTIAN HOME.—Col. iii, 12-25.

(12) Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; (13) Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. (14) And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. (15) And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. (16) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (17) And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. (18) Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. (19) Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. (20) Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. (21) Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. (22) Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: (23) And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; (24) Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. (25) But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.—Col. iii, 12-25.

The doctrinal and practical teachings in this epistle and in that to the Ephesians are strikingly similar. In the latter we see the believer seated together with Christ in the heavenly places; here we have, as a ground for his high practical argument, this, in the first verse of our present chapter: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." The fourth and fifth chapters of Ephesians are identical in subject and general method of treatment with the third and fourth chapters of this epistle. Again we have the "old man" and the "new man," and their identification with the perverted sinful nature and the renewed gracious nature of man, followed by practically the same exhortations to "put off" the one and "put on" the other, with special illustrations in practical morals.

I.—THE ELECT OF GOD.

The Apostle addresses the Colossians as the "elect of God." This term has been for ages one which has given rise to much con-

troversy, to the no little spiritual pride and to still more deep and dark depression of human souls. It has been held to designate those certain individuals of the human race who, by an arbitrary choice based wholly on the absolutely free will of God, have been chosen by a fixed decree to eternal life, to the exclusion of the rest of the human family, who have of necessity been left to suffer the damnation due to their sins. Somehow this doctrine, or rather this interpretation of the doctrine, has always met with a protest from the common consciousness of God's people. That sinners deserve to be damned if they deliberately reject the salvation of God, provided in Christ Jesus, and lovingly and persistently urged upon them, is easily admitted, even though originally they were not responsible for their sinful natures, but that, being brought into the world without their consent or agency, tainted with sin and already under the sentence of death, and then delivered over to damnation for rejecting a salvation which has never been provided for them, and to which they were never chosen by God, has revolted the innate sense of justice which is still remnant even in the moral nature of sinful men. It is only of late years, comparatively, that the consensus of the Church of Christ has practically given up this interpretation of the doctrine of election (though there have not been wanting in every age of the Church those who have stoutly opposed it). A more careful reading and study of the Word of God show us that the election does not so much stand in the individual, as *in the purpose of God to save man through Jesus Christ*, on a principle of grace, from which all works and human merit are excluded. Election has to do primarily, then, with the *method* of God's grace rather than with the particular individual who is saved by means of this "election" of grace, which is *in Christ*. The truth of the matter is rather that God has chosen to save sinners *through and in Christ*, and not that he has in mere sovereignty chosen *certain sinners* to salvation. The term "elect" as applied to sinners designates those who have accepted God's choice of them, and given themselves to him by faith in Jesus Christ. The whole world stands in this election of grace, but those only who have accepted it are elect. The word is used with slightly different meaning, according to the context in which it is found; but this is the underlying meaning in every passage. It frequently and even commonly designates those who, having accepted Christ, have pressed on in the divine life and eagerly accepted all "the fullness of the blessing of the Gospel of Christ"; and in this sense are the "choicest" ones among the called. (Matt. xx, 16; II. Pet. i, 10; Rev. xvii, 14.) The elect ones of God are said to be "*holy*," because

their choice or election is not to salvation irrespective of character, but "through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." (I. Pet. i, 2.) The Holy Spirit of God as the agent in their salvation, and the blood of Christ as the ground of it, both co-operate to make the believer a holy man. Besides, the end of their election is, that they might be presented "holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight." (Col. i, 22.) The real meaning of the word sanctify is to "set apart"; the end of the setting apart is unto holiness; and so the elect are holy as God regards them, and also because grace will presently make them so in fact, as they are holy potentially in the purpose of God. They are said to be "*beloved*"; not only because as all sinners are the objects of God's love, but now, standing in their new relation to God in Christ Jesus, his "well-beloved Son," in whom they are accepted (Eph. i, 6), they are beloved for his sake as well as the Father's. The love of God as well as the election of God stands in a peculiar sense in Christ. All who are attached to and found in Christ are beloved even as Christ is beloved. To these elect ones the Apostle therefore addresses his exhortation.

1. The Christian arrayed in beautiful garments.—In his use of the figure of the new man or the youthful man, there is a mixture of the metaphor in which the idea of garments has a place. "Put on" the things enumerated below as one would put on garments. It is becoming that the "elect of God, holy, and beloved," should be clothed according to their position, and in garments which correspond to their holy relation. These garments are set forth under the following several characteristic virtues, which all belong to the new man. "*Bowels of mercies.*" This expression is the sum of the garments in the same sense that "love" is the sum of the fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. v, 22.) What follows are but details of these "bowels of mercy." It is the same thought here that we find in the expression (Eph. iv, 32) "tender-hearted"—that inward disposition which is so characteristic of God. (Luke i, 78; compare with II. Cor. vii, 15; Phil. i, 8; Philemon 12; I. John iii, 17.) If our inward affection is right toward our brethren the outward expression of it will be right also. Make the heart good as the tree, and the action or bearing of the life will be good as the fruit. Right-heartedness toward our brethren must be the basis of all our intercourse. The particular attitude in the various aspects of this tender-heartedness is set forth in three several groups, each containing or naming two virtues of close kin to each other.

(i) "*Kindness and humbleness of mind.*" Here we have a descrip-

tion of the disposition of mind toward our brother and toward God. In kindness we see a gentle, helpful disposition, in opposition to harshness of judgment and cold severity of manner. (Rom. xi, 22.) In humbleness of mind, we see that attitude toward God which is mindful of our own demerits, and the need we have of God's loving-kindness toward ourselves; and also that disposition which constrains us not to think too highly of ourselves or too meanly of our brother, whatever may be the present difference in our condition, even with the contrast seemingly in our own favor. "Each esteems others better than themselves" expresses the humility of mind which becomes the elect of God. Humble-mindedness does not necessarily involve the presence or consciousness of sin; it may look to the position of voluntary subjection to our brethren for their good; even as Christ humbled himself to become a man for our sakes, and then went even further and washed his disciples' feet. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

(ii) "*Meekness and longsuffering.*" By meekness we understand that disposition which is the opposite of that fierceness of spirit which is prompt to resent injuries and to right ourselves rather than suffer wrong, leaving the righting of it to God. In this respect Jesus was our great example. "When he was reviled, he reviled not again." Not because he did not feel the wrong, but because he chose, out of love, rather to bear the wrong. This is a virtue which the quick-tempered man ought especially to cultivate. It was in this respect that Moses, naturally a man of quick and fierce temper, obtained the distinguished commendation of being the "very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." "Long-suffering" is the natural outcome of meekness. The truly meek man will bear injuries, not simply because he has not the spirit to resent them, but because, choosing rather to suffer wrong than to do wrong, he patiently bears, in the hope that the brother toward whom this virtue is exercised will, through forbearance, come to a better mind himself. It takes the good of the brother into account quite as much as the proper cultivation of grace in one's self. The same thought is in Eph. iv, 32.

(iii) "*Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another.*" This rather is an illustration of how the above dispositions of the mind are put into action. It describes the mode of treatment under given circumstances. If any have a quarrel or a complaint against any, the proper thing to do is not to be hasty in settling it by demanding to be righted, but in the first place quietly bearing with the wrong done, and forgiving the offender. The forgiveness is an advance

upon the forbearance. One may forbear to take vengeance and yet by no means *forgive*; but if we forgive the wrong done there ceases to be any wrong, and therefore any occasion for forbearance! The example in this respect, as in all others, is Christ himself, who has forgiven us. "So also do ye," is a distinct reference to that golden rule of action suggested in the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." The forgiveness must be both in kind and in measure, as Christ's forgiveness of us,—full, free, ungrudging, covering not one but many offenses, and without bitter remembrance cherished because of the wrong done. The whole heart must be cleared by forgiveness. If this great virtue were only more practiced it would bring about heaven upon earth. It is noticeable that there is a mutuality of forbearance and forgiveness enjoined here.

(iv) "*The bond of perfectness.*" This injunction is the crown of all. "Above all . . . put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." This is indeed "the greatest thing in the world." It "shall cover the multitude of sins." The comment in this final injunction is found in that wonderful chapter of Paul's. (I. Cor. xiii, 4-8.) The thought is not that there is a merit or atonement in charity for *our* sins, but that it reaches out and covers a multitude of sins in others. It seems to hide, forget, and forgive the wrong-doer, either in what he has done to us, or to others, or to himself, and to clothe him with a garment which will hide these defects from the eyes of the world, and seeks even to bring down upon him the very charity or love of God. It is "the bond of perfectness." That is, having clothed yourself in the various garments enumerated above, then put on over all "charity," that garment which holds all other virtues in place and together. It is the cincture of all the graces of the new man. Happy is the Christian man who is clothed in these beautiful garments, and who walks abroad thus arrayed in love. In such an one verily is the God of love perfected.

2. The Christian under rule or government.—"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." This is not so much a command as a great wish expressed. When our Lord was leaving his disciples he said: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." (John xiv, 27.) This is that double peace which is both *with* God and *of* God—the peace which has settled down upon the soul through the redemption which is in Christ, and which has come into our life to take care of it as a guard. (Phil. iv, 7.) Bring the life under this double peace, and it is under heavenly government. Let it reign there and have dominion. If only we will be still and not take the

management of our own lives into our own hands, this heavenly ruler will take care of our lives both in respect of our sins against God, and the offenses of our brethren against *us*; and also in respect of all the outward circumstances of life. Moreover, the Apostle tells us distinctly that hereunto "ye are called." God has called us unto holiness as saints in relation to himself, and unto peace as brethren in relation to each other and the whole world. He reminds us that we "are called in one body." We cannot well quarrel with our own bodies, or one member with another, for we cannot get on at all unless the whole body is in harmony, each member serving the other. "And be ye thankful." If only we could rightly appreciate our election in Christ and the true end of our salvation, we would be so thankful that we would scarce have room in our hearts for any disturbing emotions. Indeed, it is only when we are thankful that the peace of Christ can rule. (Phil. iv, 7.)

3. Sanctified Christian conversation.—The old man gives forth his conversation out of an unclean heart; in filthy communications out of the mouth. (Eph. iv, 29, 31.) In contrast with this the new man is to sanctify his conversation. In order to this the Apostle exhorts: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." God's Word will sanctify the thoughts, and so purge the conversation from all filthiness, fill the mouth with "words fitly spoken," and make it a "well of life." Instead of defiling one another with evil speech, the communications between Christians will be to edification, "teaching and admonishing one another." The Apostle does not mean that our conversation is to be carried on by singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; but in the spirit of gladness and with words of purity and thanksgiving; with gladness in our hearts, which will, in fact, turn all our conversation into true praise and gladness. If one is filled with the Word of God as the Psalmist was with the commandments and statutes of the Lord (Ps. cxix, 5-6), how chaste and beautiful and edifying would be intercourse between Christians. I am sure the meaning is not that there is to be no conversation except on strictly religious topics; but that in the spirit of religion we are to speak, as indeed we are to do all things, "giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father by him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Nothing tends more to the true and best culture of a man than purity of speech out of a glad heart, with the whole life striving toward the pleasing of the Lord. This is the whole duty of the Christian, to "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Just as sometimes we say of a man that his life is a song or a poem, so a Christian's life should be a psalm, a hymn, and a spiritual song.

II.—THE CHRISTIAN AT HOME.

If these qualities of the new man are necessary to a proper regulation of our relations with our brethren in general, in the Church of God, how much more are they necessary in the closer relation of the family and household life. Therefore the Apostle turns to the home and seeks to apply these principles there. And, indeed, if we too apply them there, we shall be in little danger of failing to apply them outside. It is in the home life that we are brought into more intimate knowledge of each other than anywhere else in the world. Here each other's faults and failings are best known; here there is more free expression of the feelings of the heart and life. The home bond will not allow us to part from each other's company, and at the same time it frees us from those external restraints which often hold us back from an outward expression of the vile humors of the old man. The husband and wife who are bound together with the bond of perfectness will hardly quarrel with other men and women. The parent and child who are knit together in love will not have difficulty in getting along either with young or old outside the family. The master and servant who have come to recognize mutual relations and responsibilities in Christ will be able to play their parts toward all other masters and servants.

1. The wife and the husband. — (i) "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord." (Eph. v, 22; Tit. ii, 4, 5; I. Pet. iii, 1.) The wife is not the servant of the husband, but one with him, and in the holy union which God has established between them the husband is the proper head, in whom resides the final authority in all household matters. The wife is indeed the heart in this union, and if she will, she may rule the head with love; but in any case she will not find it difficult to submit to a rule which she herself has practically dictated. (ii) "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." Authority in this union is not arbitrary but loving. Because a man is the head of the wife he has not the right to be bitter and hard in exercising his authority. Indeed, if he love his wife he cannot be, for no man ever yet was bitter against himself, and the wife and the husband are one body. If the wife is to obey her husband, the husband must be sure to love his wife before he lays commands upon her. The love is as obligatory in one case as the obedience is in the other. Happy household where both these obligations are faithfully carried out in the fear of the Lord!

2. The children and the parents.—(i) The children are to obey their parents in all things. This command is limited by the expression “in the Lord.” (Eph. vi, 1.) The father has no right to command his child to do anything contrary to the will of God, *i. e.*, to command him to do what is wrong. Of course the father, being a child of God himself, will not do this, and it is of the Christian household the Apostle is speaking. The child must not set up his will against his father’s, nor his immature judgment against that of his father. Fathers often lay commands on their children, the necessity or wisdom of which does not appear to the child. The child must nevertheless obey, “for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.” Many a child has seen cause to thank and bless his father for a course taken with him which at the time he bitterly resented or reluctantly submitted to. (ii) The father on his part must not be arbitrary or too exacting with his child. He must consider his youth and immature powers, and not expect too much from him. He must be careful not to try to put his old head on his child’s young shoulders; not to provoke by hard and impossible commands, and thus discourage him. “The willing horse must not be spurred.” Even children have rights which parents are bound to respect. A too stern parent often makes a stubborn son, and a too tight rein over one’s child often induces wildness and license after the natural authority has ceased by reason of advancing years.

3. The servant and the master.—Here the Apostle goes into greater detail than in discussing the other relations in the home. It is because the servant’s place in the home is the hardest one. In the case in the Apostle’s mind it was not voluntary servitude, but the servant was a slave, bound to his master by bonds which were unnatural and unwarranted by the higher law of Christ, yet recognized as one of the world’s evils which could not at once be set right. Nevertheless in the Lord the slave and the master could both bear themselves in a way which would lighten the heavy burden of the one and soften the unnatural responsibility of the other. (i) The servant must obey the master in all things, just as the child must, even though the natural and original loving relation is not there. He is a master according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit. But the servant must not on this account be surly or resentful. He must rise above the mere eye-service of the rebellious but helpless slave; he must be no mere man-pleaser; but, grasping his liberty in Christ, have a single eye to God, and be cheered by the thought that he is God’s servant notwithstanding the humiliating and galling nature of the present relation. “In singleness of heart, fearing God.” Doing

everything heartily, freely, cheerfully, not considering his earthly master alone, but rather the Lord, who is master of both slave and slave-owner. He shall not lose his heavenly inheritance because for the present he belongs to another man; nay, he is the Lord's servant. If wrong is done him by his master he must bear it; the Lord will right him and recompense his wrong. God does not respect the person of the master more than the person of the servant. (ii) The master is admonished that he also has a Master in heaven, to whom he must give an account even as he holds authority over his earthly servant. Therefore let him be careful to give to his servant that which is just and equal. These principles ought to hold good even in our day, when the bonds between masters and servants are voluntary. There is a necessity upon some of us to be the servants of others even though we are not their slaves, and in these relations we too must learn to "*serve the Lord Christ.*"

XLIX.

GRATEFUL OBEDIENCE.—James i, 16-27.

(16) Do not err, my beloved brethren. (17) Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. (18) Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (19) Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: (20) For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. (21) Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. (22) But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. (23) For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: (24) For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. (25) But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. (26) If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. (27) Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.—James i, 16-27.

James was the half-brother of our Lord, and the chief pastor of the church at Jerusalem. He was subsequently put to death by Herod, being beheaded with the sword. The Jewish Christians were a most difficult body of people to govern; for while they had accepted Jesus as the Christ and had formally broken with Judaism, they still retained all their national characteristics, were proud of their race, and slow and reluctant to recognize the Gentiles as being on a spiritual level with themselves and entitled to the same privileges in the Gospel. They were still fierce haters of the Romans, and had the idea deeply rooted in their minds that they were the chosen people of God for the propagation of Christianity as they had been for the custody of revelation. They were carnal in their ideas, and could not somehow get rid of the idea that the Christian Church was to be more or less a national and political organization, to be carried forward by carnal zeal and carnal weapons. At the time this epistle was written they were suffering severe trials and afflictions on account of their faith and their misguided zeal. They resented their trials, and quarreled in spirit with God for suffering them to come.

Their faith was wavering, and they were altogether in a most dangerous spiritual condition. In resenting their real or fancied wrongs they were fierce and wrathful in disposition, and then they were disposed to justify their bad tempers and fanatical passions by saying that God had tempted them to wrong-doing, if there was wrong in it. There were other grave defects in their Christian life, which their pastor was most earnestly desirous of correcting. Especially he was anxious as to the reality of their true spirituality, and to show them the radical difference between a merely formal faith and a deeply inwrought one; between ceremonial religion and practical holiness; between right and wrong methods of doing God's work, right and wrong relations between the rich and poor, the “brother of low degree and him of high.” The Epistle of James has been called the “common sense of Christianity.” He deals almost exclusively with the practical side of faith, and with the life which is the outcome of redemption, rather than with the great facts connected with our redemption. At the same time he implies all the doctrinal truth which Paul sets forth. His, however, is more of an exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, applied to the Christian life, and as being the true ideal to be attained. Every one of the seven beatitudes of our Lord is distinctly referred to in this epistle.

I.—“THE FATHER OF LIGHTS.”

There were some wrong views of God afloat among them; nay, they were being sadly and dangerously infected with some seriously false doctrine concerning God the Father, which he wished to correct. He therefore, at the point at which our particular study begins, utters a note of warning. (v. 16.)

1. **A caution against false doctrine.**—“Do not err, my beloved brethren.” It is a tender but earnest warning against the danger of taking up with false teaching, and so being led into false and harmful conduct. In the early Church there were many false teachers and dangerous doctrines. Sound doctrine is at the bottom of a sound life. As a man “thinketh in his heart” (or believeth) “so is he.” The warning here refers to both what follows and to what precedes this verse in the epistle; more especially to what precedes, in respect of God being in any sense the author of sin. If sin can be traced to God in any way, then it ceases to be sinful. This, however, is the very worst of heresies, and James refutes it with strong and clear language. “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” to it. If there be evil in the world, as there is, it

is the result of man's own actions. Desire, like a wicked and wanton woman, leads man to sin; and then when sin has entered into the life it brings forth death. But this is not of God, and James will not allow such a thought to gain currency in the Church without his strong and vigorous protest. The most difficult problem we have to face out here in India is the problem, philosophically considered, of the origin of sin. The Hindoo at large holds that sin is one of the outcomes of the divine activity in man; that God is omnipresent, and so the absolute Author of everything; that man is but one manifestation of God, and all that man does, both good and evil, are but manifestations of God. This pantheism cuts the nerve of the conscience and throws back all responsibility for sin upon God.

2. God is the Author and Giver of all good, and only of good.—Just as sin cometh from man himself and only from man, yielding to his lust, so all that is good in this world is the direct emanation or gift from God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from" God. Not only all temporal good, but all spiritual good, comes down from God. The probability is, from the expression "cometh down," and from what follows as a specific illustration, that the writer is referring more particularly to spiritual gifts. He is "the Father of Lights." As the sun is the source of all the lights (planets) which shine out in our system, so God is the original source of all the spiritual lights in this world. "God is light." (I. John i, 5.) "The Light of the World" was one of the titles of Jesus. (John i, 9; viii, 12.) He came to light the world, to lead men out of darkness into the light of God, and to banish darkness (sin) out of their lives. In him "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." This is almost equivalent to what John says of him: "And in him is no darkness at all." (I. John i, 5.) This declaration of the unvariableness of God's character for light, and his shadowlessness, refers to what he had before said, repudiating the thought that he could in any way be the author of sin or tempt any man to sin. God's absolute holiness is absolutely changeless. It casts no shadow of darkness. Clouds may intervene to obscure the light, and men may come in between God and the world of men and make shadows, but God himself casts no shadow. It follows that his people should, being filled with his life, cast no darkness. "Ye are the light of the world." (Matt. v, 14.) If we cast shadows of darkness upon the world of men, it is because of sin that is in us, and not because of the good and perfect gift which has come down from above from the Father of Lights. Let no man therefore say that his darkness is of God, for God is only and always light. "If

we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” (I. John i, 6, 7.) It is easy to see the bearing of all this, both on what he had before said and upon what he is about to say, in respect to the conduct of the Jewish Christians to whom he was writing. Instead of God tempting to sin, or fostering sin in us, if we have sin and will only walk in God’s light, that light must chase away our darkness as the rising sun chases away the darkness from the earth. God as Light never sets. He is the Sun of the moral universe and is always at meridian.

3. God is the Author of our regeneration.—Man by nature and practice is a sinner. As such he is full of darkness. That we may be the children of light our nature must be so changed as to receive the light of God into our souls. Indeed, the light of God must shine into our hearts before they can be changed, and be filled with light. He therefore speaks of the greatest of all gifts (after Jesus Christ) which has come down from above to men, from the Father of Lights, viz., Regeneration. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.” Here are several great truths packed into small compass. (i) The true Christian is a man who is born from above. (John iii, 3, marg.) He has no power of himself to change his nature. Light may shine *into* darkness, but light cannot come *out of* darkness. Man cannot regenerate himself. We are “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man.” (John i, 13.) That is, regeneration is not by descent from godly parents; no man by his will can beget us by the use of ceremonies or ordinances; neither by any will of our own, or personal energy in the way of resolute determination to make ourselves better, can we become the children of God. The new birth is a “new creation.” (II. Cor. v, 17.) (ii) This great gift from God is purely a sovereign gift. “Of his own will begat he us.” He was not induced thereto by anything in us, or done by us, or by reason of any intercession of others. This of course refers to his purpose of grace in Christ, and not to any discouragement from prayer on our part that he would regenerate our friends. The whole plan of salvation as well as the whole method of grace is the result of his own free, sovereign, and loving will. (iii) “With the word of truth.” His truth—that is, the gospel of God and of Christ—is the instrument of our regeneration, as the Holy Ghost is the agent of it: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liv-

eth and abideth forever." (I. Pet. i, 23.) (iv) "That we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." In three senses every Christian is a kind of first-fruit to God. (a) We are his peculiarly in this new bond of spiritual consecration. We have been separated from the rest of men and brought into his temple. (Lev. xxiii, 10, 11; Jer. ii, 3.) (b) The children of God have the first and chiefest dignity among all his creatures. (c) We are the forerunners of a vast harvest of souls to be gathered into his garner. This was peculiarly true of the Jews, to whom the offer of the Gospel came first. They were not to be the exclusive beneficiaries of God's grace, but were to precede the Gentiles into the kingdom. The vast harvest was to be from the Gentile world. This should have corrected their prejudices against the Gentiles, and made them glad in seeing them pressing into the kingdom in such numbers, instead of exciting in them jealousy and even hatred, as though they were being preferred before them. There is also intimated in this that it is through regenerated people that God is to save the world. Every Christian, therefore, ought to consider himself pledged to effect through the power of God the salvation of some other soul. How soon would the harvest be gathered if each one of us were a real "first-fruit"!

II.—WRATH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The writer now turns to another branch of the subject; that is, he takes up a very practical matter, growing somewhat out of what has been already said, and rightly following on after his last declaration, as to the true basis of the Christian life in regeneration. The gentle graciousness of a man who is now by a new birth become a son of God, should be after the manner of the graciousness and kindness of God himself. Then, moreover, the wrath or ungracious bitterness of man's spirit is not fitted to advance the righteousness of God in the earth. The "wherefore, my beloved brethren," with which the Apostle introduces this topic, shows that what he is about to say naturally grows out of what he has just said as to man's new spiritual relation to God.

1. Swift to hear, slow to speak.—There is an old proverb which says that God, in making man, gave him two ears but only one mouth, thereby indicating that there was much more to be heard than spoken, or that a man ought to hear twice as much as he speaks. It is a good rule. Little mischief can come of hearing even evil things if one keeps a guard on his lips. Even evil thoughts get smothered in the heart if there is no outlet for them through the lips.

If it is good things that we give our ears to hearing, it is still better that we take time to ponder them well before we send them forth re-echoed with our own die upon them. Whether the writer is speaking of hearing the word and speaking forth the Gospel again, or whether he is speaking of controversial hearing and speaking, has been much debated by exegetes. It seems, however, pretty clear from the immediate context that he is referring to a fanatical, fierce sort of speech which the irritable, hot-headed, and impassioned Jewish Christians were in the habit of indulging in in their religious controversies. They would scarce give their opponent time to speak one word before they poured forth a torrent upon him. They were unwilling to listen to the other side, or consider what *they* had to say against whom they were arrayed in debate. It refers to passionate, angry, and fanatical speech, by which the speakers wished or sought to overwhelm their opponents, at the same time refusing to consider what *they* might have to say. It is angry speech that James is cautioning his brethren against. The cure for this is a quick ear and a slow tongue. Everybody knows that the quick speaker is the one who is apt to become the angry speaker, thereby both dishonoring the cause he would uphold, and defeating the very end he has in view. The patient hearer who takes time to deliberate upon what he hears has time to answer discreetly, and to meet his adversary at best advantage. That is good advice given by Solomon: "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything." (Eccles. v, 2.) This he spoke of making rash vows, but it is equally good advice concerning any kind of speech.

2. The wrath of man and the righteousness of God.—"For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." This evidently points to the fact that the angry speech alluded to above was controversial religious speech—an impetuous, angry, and fanatical zeal which became wrath in the speaker. This kind of preaching or testimony for God cannot possibly bring about the extension of his righteousness among men. Christ forbade the use of the sword in the propagation of the Gospel, because the Gospel stands in the power of God, and not in the force of man; and because the righteousness of God is peace, and not anger. Here we are admonished not to use the sword of the lips, or turn one's tongue into a sword to be wielded by an angry and wrathful heart. The zeal of the Mohammedans indeed conquered whole empires and subdued many millions of people to the outward faith of the false prophet, but it did not work the righteousness of God. Neither did the fierce anger of the Christian crusaders, which sent them forth in wrath

against the Mohammedans, work the righteousness of God. The true sword of the Spirit is the Word of God preached in love and with a heart stayed on God and overflowing with tender love for man. Let us give our enemies or our opponents ample time to state their case; let them have their say; let us patiently hear them out, and then, with deliberate conviction and careful and courteous speech, make our reply in the name of God. This is most excellent advice just now, when the whole Church is ringing with controversy in which everybody seems so quick to speak and so slow to hear. He laughs best who laughs last, and he speaks best who waits to have the last word, not in anger, but in quietness and strength of the truth, "as the truth is in Jesus." God stands in need of no swords to propagate his Gospel, and he is dishonored when the children of light use angry, fierce, and fanatical words. His righteous reign among men will not be furthered in that way.

III.—MEEKNESS AND THE WORD OF GOD.

Having pointed out the evil of the vicious method of religious propagation, the writer now proceeds to urge upon his brethren the true method of spreading and extending the righteousness of God among men. The great weapon for the advancement of God's cause in the world is the Word of God faithfully received, and faithfully carried out in our own personal lives and in doing the will of God toward others. This does not imply that we are not to testify the Gospel in private speech or public proclamation, but that while doing the latter we must first be careful to do the former. There is no danger that there will not be enough speech, but there is danger that there will be unwise speech and not enough right living and doing.

1. **Laying aside naughtiness.**—The first thing to be done, says James, is to "lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness." There seems little doubt but that he refers in this expression to the wrathful spirit and overflowing words of anger which proceed from that wrath and pour out of the mouth of the carnal controversialist. On the other hand, we should with a meek and chastened spirit listen to and receive the ingrafted Word of God. This is like repentance before faith, or like cleaning a good bit of ground overgrown with weeds, preparatory to sowing good seed in it. (Matt. xiii, 3, 7, 8.) Wrath and malice and anger make but a filthy garment for the spirit of one of God's people; and to deluge one's neighbor, even though he be a sinner, with angry words, cannot be pleasing to God or work anything but ill to man.

2. Doers of the Word of God.—In enforcing the exhortation to receive the ingrafted Word, James cautions his brethren that to hear the Word and not patiently to do it (*i.e.*, to let it have its first proper effect in *one's own life*) is but to deceive one's self. A mere knowledge of the truth is only dead orthodoxy. No matter how glibly one may talk of God and Christ, no matter how sound his teaching, if it has not found a place in a meek heart it will still burst forth from an unbridled tongue. Such a man's "religion is vain." (v. 26.) To hear the Word carelessly or not to receive it deep down in one's heart is like looking into a mirror for a moment, and going away and forgetting what manner of man one is. The Word of God is a mirror to expose our own hearts to us as well as to reveal the image of God. We must look long enough to get a clear knowledge of our own sins, and of our own salvation from sin, before we are fitted to enforce that Word upon others. A life consistent with the Gospel we preach is the best argument with which to enforce our testimony. The Word of God—that is, his completed revelation in the Gospel—is a "perfect law of liberty" or deliverance. If we look carefully, and take faithfully into our hearts what we find there, and continue therein—that is, in the faith of the Gospel—and be not forgetful of it, but a persistent doer of it, then we shall be blessed in all our efforts. "This man shall be blessed in his deed." Our words become deeds when they are words spoken out of a pure heart and a good conscience, and in the love of Christ—such deeds as will tend to spread the righteousness of God where swords and earthly power would utterly fail. The first Psalm tells us of the man who meditates in the Word of God, day and night, and declares that such a man is prospered in whatsoever he doeth. The teaching of James holds good with David and also with Paul. (Rom. x, 9–15.) If, on the other hand, we seem to be religious—that is, just go through the forms of religion while in fact we are at heart only fierce sectarians and fanatical propagandists—our religion is vain, and we have deceived our own hearts with a false hope of salvation, as well as failed to win any converts to God.

3. "Pure religion and undefiled."—James deals with the practical side of religion. He would have more living and doing than doctrine in the Church; that is to say, he would have doctrine enforced not by *argument*, but by being translated into life and deeds. The poor we have with us always, and God would be better pleased with us, if, instead of merely arguing and contending for the truth, especially in an angry and sectarian spirit, we should "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and keep 'ourselves' un-

spotted from the world." This he calls pure and undefiled religion. Here these holy deeds of kindness and a pure and holy life are put in contrast with the "all filthiness of anger and wrath, and the overflowing naughtiness of words," which breathe not the Spirit of Christ nor set forth the real truth of the Gospel. To know the Word of God, and our own hearts by means of that Word, and Jesus Christ and his sin-cleansing blood; to do the Word of God in sanctification of the Spirit; to show forth the love of God to the poor and distressed whom God has left in our midst to prove the sincerity of our love to him; and to keep ourselves clean from the world, which is always ready to spot and defile us—will go further toward converting the world than all mere religious controversy.

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L.

THE HEAVENLY INHERITANCE.—I Peter i, 1-12.

(1) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, (2) Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. (3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4) To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, (5) Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (6) Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: (7) That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: (8) Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: (9) Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. (10) Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: (11) Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. (12) Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.—I. Peter i, 1-12.

The dignity of the noble utterances of this epistle makes it to rank among the chiefest of the apostolic writings. It has always been a favorite book with believers, and is full of the comfort of hope. Paul has been designated as the apostle of Faith; John, the apostle of Love; and Peter, the apostle of Hope; and indeed, I think these designations are true. Certainly Peter strikes a high note of hope in this epistle, and maintains it. It is a song of salvation clear through to the end. Though he is not so dogmatic as Paul in his presentation of the great underlying truths of our salvation, he is none the less clear. The precious blood of Christ and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead are conspicuously set forth as the ground of our justification and the foundation of our faith. (i, 18-21.) Faith and regeneration are clearly taught as entering

into the essential qualification of the soul for its present and final communion with God. (i, 2, 22, 23.) Holiness, with joy and peace under and in the midst of trial, and hope mounting up on the wings of a present salvation to lay hold on an inheritance reserved and ready to be revealed (i, 3, 4, 16), as necessary characteristics of the saints, form conspicuous points of the teaching of this noble epistle. No wonder it has been one of the most read and most helpful of the divine writings. May the Spirit of God minister to our own souls a great blessing while we pursue this short study from its opening chapter.

I.—THE SALUTATION.

This, like all the apostolic epistles (except that to the Hebrews), opens with a salutation in which the writer introduces himself, designates his relation to the church or the people to whom he writes, as well as their own address and standing. In this case the salutation is simple and gracious.

1. Peter the apostle.—Peter here styles himself “an apostle of Jesus Christ.” He is but one of several others. He does not say “the chief apostle” or the “first apostle,” but just “an” apostle. There is in none of the writings of this great servant of Jesus Christ even the remotest hint of a claim to any kind of primacy in the apostolic office; neither is there in *any* of the references to him by the other apostolic writers of the New Testament any least recognition of such a claim. Indeed, the pretensions of the popes of Rome are as arbitrary as they are blasphemous. An apostle was a special messenger commissioned and sent forth by Jesus Christ to declare the glad tidings of salvation and to testify his resurrection from the dead. In order to be an apostle “of Jesus Christ” it was necessary that one should have been the constant companion of the Lord Jesus Christ from the beginning of his ministry; to have heard his teaching and to have been an eye-witness of the fact of his resurrection. All these qualifications Peter possessed, and they are again and again referred to by him, in his addresses and writings, not ostentatiously, but incidentally; not for the purpose of proving his apostleship, but simply in the course of teaching. Peter was especially sent “to them of the circumcision,” or to his own countrymen; though at first he seems to have been designated as the apostle to the Gentiles. All his writings, as well as whatever of his history we know from the Acts of the Apostles, show him to have been in the closest sympathy with the Jewish people; and that his conception of the doctrines of Christ and the great salvation in him was

in accordance with the ancient Scriptures of his people and consistent with their great theocratic hope.

2. The strangers scattered abroad.—This epistle is not addressed to any particular person or church, but to the Jewish Christians, scattered throughout Asia Minor, Pontus, Galatia, Capadocia, Asia, and Bithynia; which places seem to have been the scenes of his former labors. Though he was now in Babylon, preaching and teaching in that ancient city where the great Daniel spent the greater portion of his life, his heart was still with those scattered sheep of the Jewish Christian fold, who he heard were at this time in great suffering and trial. He yearned over them, as a true shepherd over his flock, greatly desiring to comfort them.

3. Their standing.—He begins by reminding them of their relation to God, and how they came to be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. This of itself would serve to strengthen their faith and enliven their hope. (i) They were “elect ones.” Peter uses this term simply to designate them as belonging to the “peculiar people,” who were “a chosen generation” and “a royal priesthood.” (ii, 9.) It was the glory of the ancient Jewish people to stand in this close and peculiar relation to God, both as to his love, and for witness and service. Peter would remind them that in becoming Christians they had lost none of their privileges, but that all of them had rather been enhanced; for it is only in Christ that their old shadowy claims in this respect became a substantial reality. (ii) Their standing was “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” The reference here is not only to a fact, but especially to remind them that their present distressing circumstances could in no wise impair their relation to God; for from the beginning, God, who had chosen them to salvation, had foreknown all their *circumstances* as really as he had foreknown *them*. (iii) Their position and standing with God was no arbitrary one. Their choice by God had been made “through sanctification of the Spirit.” Therefore they had been born of God by the Spirit, and so were the elect of God, not merely in outward standing, as simply Jews, but by inward character, which made them his sons. (iv) This sanctification of the Spirit, again, was not a work which had been arbitrarily wrought in them; but it had been brought about by that faith which had led them, in obedience to the word and teaching of God, to Jesus Christ, who through the “sprinkling of his blood” on the great mercy-seat, had obtained for them the forgiveness of their sins and eternal salvation. (Heb. ix, 11-14, 24-26; x, 19-22.) (v) Having thus reminded them of the solidity of the foundation on which they stood with God, he gives them this

benediction: "Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied." That is, he wishes that all the gifts of the new covenant may be bestowed upon them, and that the peace of God may be theirs in increasing measure, even in their present distressing circumstances. (Phil. iv, 4-8.) In this salutation we see the respective parts taken in our salvation by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father has *chosen* us to salvation; the Son has *sprinkled* his blood for our redemption; and the Holy Spirit has *wrought* the renewal of our characters, which qualifies us for our high destiny.

II.—THE INHERITANCE OF THE SAINTS.

Having thus graciously saluted them and reminded them of their high calling, the Apostle now proceeds to remind them of their great hope, which should cheer them in their present circumstances, and even fill them with joy. It is the apprehension of the good "things which God hath prepared for them that love him," that makes the life that now is, tolerable even in distressing circumstances, and prevents it from becoming a snare to us when all around is peace and prosperity. On the one hand we can bear all things, seeing that the time for suffering is short, and the time for glory is at hand; on the other hand we are helped to moderate our carnal affections and hold the present world with a loose hand, seeing we are so soon to quit it for a better one.

1. Praise to God.—Peter begins the enumeration of their good things in Christ by first sounding a note of praise to God and Jesus Christ, through whom all these blessings have come to us, and who are still active in bringing about "the end of our faith." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is through his "abundant mercy" that we are what we *are*, and not what we *were*, and shall be what we are not yet. It is no small mercy that has saved us, and we are the more confident and grateful because we are saved by the "abundant mercy" of God. He has plenty of mercy, and there is no fear that our great need will ever exhaust his supply of it. For this reason it is meet that we should give him praise on every remembrance of our hope. He who sends praise before him as a forerunner is sure to be honored when he comes before God in prayer.

2. The living hope.—This note of praise is awakened in Peter's heart by the thought of the "lively hope" which is his and theirs. When Jesus appeared among the Jewish nation, and by his mighty words and deeds gave proof that he was a "teacher come from God,"

the hope that he was the true Messiah was awakened in the hearts of those who became his disciples (Luke xxiv, 21); but his untimely and violent death, as it seemed to them, had destroyed that hope. Their conception of the hope had been a material one, and they looked for an earthly kingdom and an earthly inheritance. With the death and burial of Jesus their hope died, and was buried with him in Joseph's tomb. They had tenderly loved him, they had confidently hoped in him; but what could a *dead* Christ do for them? How could he fulfill *to* them and *in* them all the glorious promises of God spoken by the prophets of old? How could a dead man (however good and great he had been in life) serve them? It was a black three days for these now hopeless disciples. But when on the third day he arose from the dead and appeared to his disciples, opened their eyes and taught them out of the Scriptures, the law, the prophets, and the Psalms, how Christ "ought . . . to have suffered and to enter into his glory," and that through his death he was to bring forth an eternal life and secure to them an inheritance transcending their wildest hopes, then indeed God begot in them a living hope, a hope that could not die so long as he lived who was the author, the reason, and the substance of it. This is what Peter means by the "lively" or living hope, and this is why he associated it with the "resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The great redemption accomplished by his death was the ground of that hope, and the resurrection was its guarantee. Therefore he speaks of them "who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your" (their) "faith and hope might be in God." (i, 21.) This hope is not the result of a mere logical inference or conclusion, but it is a living thing begotten or born in us by the energy of God, according to his abundant mercy.

3. The inheritance.—When God brought the Hebrew people up out of Egypt he gave them each and all an inheritance in the land, and in connection with that inheritance he established by David a kingdom and a glory which exceeded that of all other nations and people. This inheritance had been invaded by their powerful rivals and wrested from them, their kingdom was in the dust, and the hated Romans were ruling over them. This, so far as their national position was concerned. As a matter of fact, these particular Jewish Christians were at present dispersed from their land, and in the most distressing outward circumstances. Their own non-Christian countrymen had persecuted and ostracized them; they had been despoiled of their goods and stricken with poverty. Over against all this Peter reminds them of the inheritance which God had pre-

pared for them in connection with the risen Christ. He bids them lift their eyes from earth to heaven, and there behold their true portion. This inheritance is that spoken of in Matt. vi, 20; Luke xii, 33; x, 25; xviii, 22; Mark x, 17-21. (i) It is an "inheritance incorruptible." It cannot be affected by any external power or circumstances. It is in heaven (as to place), and eternal (as to duration). No rust can corrupt it; no moth can consume it; no thief can steal it. (ii) It is undefiled. Their earthly inheritance in Canaan was defiled with much shedding of blood and with the grossest sins, both of theirs and of those nations which invaded and defiled it with their abominations. So, indeed, the best earthly possessions and even the purest earthly joys are more or less defiled with the sins which are incident and inseparable from our unrenewed nature; but the heavenly inheritance which begins with that eternal life—"the gift of God . . . through Jesus Christ"—and is consummated and perfected amid the glories of God, is incapable of defilement. Nothing can enter there which "worketh abomination or maketh a lie." (iii) It fadeth not away. All earthly possessions are "temporary," and perish with the using, or fade away from our possession by the interposition of death; but this inheritance is in things eternal, which endure forever. The joys of salvation do not fade away. We have them even *here* in part, and death cannot take them from us or us from them, but rather opens the door to the fuller and better enjoyment of them. The first of these characteristics of the heavenly inheritance "denotes freedom from the germs of destructibility and transitoriness, which are inseparable from all earthly things; the second denies its liability to pollution by outward sin; and the third, even the alteration which makes the beauty of earthly things pass away." If there is in this inheritance also an intimation of a more earthly character, it points to that renewed and regenerated earth, in which all the perfections of heaven shall be realized, and which shall be the inheritance of the meek in the time of the restitution of all things. (Matt. v, 5; Acts iii, 21.) (iv) For the ungodly there is reserved only "judgment," "everlasting darkness," "fire," "chains"; and for the present earth, "fire" (II. Pet. ii, 4, 17; iii, 7; Jude 6, 13); but for them and us who believe, this glorious inheritance. The sinner is going on through this world with his pleasures and sufferings to these *evil* things; while the believer is going on through his sufferings and trials to all these good things. The sinner is leaving all his possible good things behind him; but the saints are leaving all their evil things behind *them*.

4. Kept of God.—If the thought of their present great trials

and temptations in connection with the future character of their inheritance should or did awaken in their hearts the fear that they might at last fail of reaching or attaining unto the full possession, he reminds them that in the mean time "they are kept" (i) "By the power of God" (Jude 24), and the "word of his grace," which in the mean time guarantees the possession, and is able to *give* the inheritance as well as to sanctify and prepare them for it. (Acts xx, 32.) (ii) Not arbitrarily, but through their active and living faith. (iii) This salvation is all prepared and ready. It is not yet revealed (I. John iii, 2), but it is "ready to be revealed" at the end of this age. No more long dispensations will intervene before the saints come into possession. The time is at hand. Readiness implies a momentary expectation of revelation. The speedy coming of our Lord was the hope of the early church, and it should be our instant expectation.

5. Triumphant joy.—In this great hope and expectation they were warranted to "greatly rejoice," and he trusted they *did* really rejoice, though just now, and in spite of the fact, they were "in heaviness through manifold trials." These sufferings had a "need be" in them; let them not be discouraged, for God foreknew it all when he called them, and is well able to make them work together for their good. The sun was for a moment, a mere season, behind a cloud of afflictions, but presently it would burst out in glory upon them.

III.—TRIAL OF THEIR FAITH.

He next proceeds to show them that their present sufferings were not without their uses, and, as he had already intimated, had a "need be" in them, which he now points out to them.

1. The master grace.—He had in the beginning wished them "great grace." The chiefest grace that God has given us is faith, that power of mind and heart by which we take hold of God through Christ, and of all things in him. This great grace he tells us is (i) "more precious than of gold," even than refined gold. With gold man can buy almost any earthly possessions and pleasures. Just now they were in poverty, but they had something more precious than gold, with which they satisfied themselves with possessions such as earth could not furnish, nor the finest gold buy. Let them traffic in these high things with this more precious coin. (ii) Their faith was by these trials being purified. This was one of the ends God had in view in suffering these trials to come upon them. In these trials their faith would be purified. The alloy of mere earthly motive and

intellectual apprehension would be purged from it. (iii) A glorified faith. When gold comes out of the crucible it is seen to be much finer than when it went in, and its beauty is enhanced and its purchasing power increased. So when faith is tried in the fire of affliction, it comes out purged, purified, and more valuable for heavenly traffic. "Unto praise and honor and glory," may refer both to the quality of the faith after purification and to the results of such a faith procured to the believer. Therefore, instead of being discouraged and disheartened by trials, let us rejoice in them if this is to be the end.

2. **Rejoicing in Christ the end of faith.**—The Apostle tells them of the "appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." "When he shall appear, we shall be like him." (I. John iii, 2, 3.) Then it will appear that these trials were all lovingly adapted to "the end of our faith," which is the salvation of our souls. Though this salvation is not yet completed, faith lays hold of it and receives it even now. It is all wrapped up in Jesus Christ, of whom they had heard, and in whom they believed, though they had never seen him. Nevertheless they loved him and in him rejoiced *even now*, "with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Here there is certainly a reference to those blessed words of Christ to Thomas, which Peter vividly remembered, having been present on that occasion: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." (John xx, 29.)

IV.—THE SUFFERINGS AND GLORY OF CHRIST.

The salvation of which he is speaking was procured for us by the Lord Jesus Christ. If they were now suffering through trials, let them not forget that their great Saviour had procured salvation for them at infinite cost of suffering. He entered into his glory through sufferings: let them be patient and rejoicing if they must needs come to theirs over the same road. "For the joy that was set before him" he "endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God," waiting to receive and welcome them into the same glory with him. Of this salvation he would have them know that it was no new and sudden thing, the evolution of recent and fortuitous conditions, but was long ago promised, the bright dawn of which was but faintly seen by the prophets of old, in whom the Spirit of Christ wrought the earlier revelations. So glorious were even the distant rays of it, that the prophets who spoke of the grace reserved for us believers were led anxiously to search into its hidden mysteries, though it was not given them fully to compre-

hend it. They did but minister to us the things which are now preached unto us, concerning the sufferings and glory of Christ, without fully understanding them. Besides this, we have a gift which they had *not*—"the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven" to illuminate our minds, and to make good in us the fruits of Christ's suffering and glory. Even the angels of heaven desired to look into these things, so greatly was their holy curiosity aroused, to understand what God was preparing for us, at such cost of suffering on Christ's part. Surely the believer is a favored one; and knowing all these things, he ought to bear up without murmuring or doubting under his present trials, which without "the lively hope" would indeed be unbearable, but *with it*, and the love of Christ present with us, are things to be welcomed and used for the perfecting of faith.

LI.

THE GLORIFIED SAVIOUR.—Rev. i, 9-20.

(9) I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. (10) I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, (11) Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. (12) And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; (13) And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. (14) His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; (15) And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. (16) And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. (17) And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: (18) I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. (19) Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; (20) The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.—Rev. i, 9-20.

If the Bible is a unique book among all the books of the world, surely the Revelation is unique among the various books of the Bible. One of the best authenticated of the New Testament writings, it had to fight hardest for a place in the New Testament Canon. It is the one book which pronounces a blessing upon him who reads it and upon them who hear it read, and who *keep* the things that are written therein. (i, 3.) At the same time it pronounces a curse upon him that adds to, or takes from, the prophecies contained therein. "If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." (xxii, 19.) These two sayings, one standing at the opening and the other at the close of the book, give to it a peculiar

solemnity. It was evidently intended that it should be much read, attentively listened to, and its contents reverently laid up and kept in the heart. This book has been perhaps more commented upon and less understood than any other book of the Bible. There is probably a greater variety and a wider difference in the interpretations of its contents than appertain to any other of the sacred writings. That it has a majesty of composition, grandeur and boldness of style and imagery, is apparent on the most casual reading. That it is carefully composed upon a most certain plan is also apparent. In no sense can it be charged upon it with truth that it is the wild and frenzied utterances of a fanatic. It moves forward with a steady and majestic tread, from the beginning to the end. The first and the last chapters are very beautiful, and easily understood; but the middle part of the book is very perplexing. It is confessedly a mystery, and most students have found it a riddle; yet it claims and chains the attention of the student once it has been fairly and honestly read. I once heard an old negro preacher in the South say that it was "like the battle of Manassas. It opens all simple and plain enough, with the bands playing, and the flags flying, and all the soldiers marching steadily and in order; then comes the firing of a few guns, the sounding of trumpets, the bursting of woes, and the awful storm and confusion of war, the smoke and darkness, out of which came the noise of battle and shrieks and groans of the wounded and dying. Then at the twentieth chapter the battle is over, the smoke has cleared away, and the reader enters heaven with victory in his hand." It was a grotesque illustration, and yet not far from the mark. Certainly it is a book to stimulate the Christian heart. There is a sense of dreadful things to come, and just ahead of us; but there is also the sense that God and Christ are in the midst of these momentous events, having all things in hand, and that out of it all glorious things are coming to his Church and people. Its warp is essentially Jewish, and its form that of an apocalypse, or revelation. It is closely allied to the books of Leviticus and Daniel. It clearly states, and assumes to be essential, the great doctrines of the incarnation, the atonement, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and makes union with him the essential thing in the life of God's people. In all its chapters Jesus appears "in power and great glory." The whole book is an exposition of his triumph and glorious exaltation, and in reading it one is filled with a desire to be on the Lord's side, and with him in his battles and victories. It makes one afraid of sin, and fills one with hatred and loathing for it. It makes the present time seem very uncertain and unsatisfac-

tory, and awakens a longing desire for the ushering in of "the new heavens and the new earth." It was written to comfort and edify the churches of Asia and all Christian churches in all ages, and at the same time to warn them against false doctrine, worldly living, and corrupting fellowships. It opens with a brief prelude, extending from the first to the third verse, which latter is a beatitude upon the reader and the hearer. Then comes the salutation of John, the writer of the book, from the fourth to the sixth verses. After that (from the seventh to the eighth) is the announcement of the theme of the book, which is the "coming of the Lord." "Behold, he cometh with clouds." In this and throughout the whole book we see a striking fulfillment in prophecy of that which Jesus said to the Sanhedrim at the time of his condemnation by them on the charge of blasphemy: "Nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." (Matt. xxvi, 64.)

I.—JOHN IN THE SPIRIT.

Having announced the theme of the book, John proceeds to tell us how he came to receive the revelation. It is hardly necessary to say that this John was the "beloved disciple," the author of the Gospel and the epistles which go by his name.

1. "**I, John.**"—He thus introduces himself to "the angels" to whom this letter or revelation was addressed. The form is said to be that peculiar to the apocalyptic calling. The same form of egotism appears in Daniel. (vii, 15; viii, 1; ix, 2; x, 2; xii, 5.) This *egotism* is not "egotism" in the offensive sense of that word, but is the peculiar style of the apocalyptist, the one who stands between the Revealer and those to whom the revelation is sent. It is a form of self-designation peculiar to Daniel and John alone. It does not imply any original authority or peculiar knowledge, but simply that they are the bearers of a particular message.

2. "**Your brother and companion.**"—This further designation of himself indicates a lowly humility, the farthest removed from any vain egotism which any might fancy was contained in the opening announcement. He asserts his brotherhood both with the particular persons to whom the revelation is addressed and with the churches for whose benefit it was given. The basis of this brotherhood is found in Jesus, who is the common head of all the family of God. We "are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." If all are children of God, then are we all brothers. But he was more

than a brother, he was their companion—that is, he was peculiarly associated with them in the circumstances which formed their present environment. It would seem that the churches, or at least certain believers and principal men in the churches, such as the pastors and elders, were suffering under the pressure of some kind of persecution. He was their “companion in tribulation.” This tribulation was clearly some form of trial brought upon him and them in connection with their devotion to Christ and the interest of his kingdom. Jesus had during his earthly ministry frequently warned his disciples, “In this world ye shall have tribulation,” and that for his sake and the Gospel’s they would be called upon to forsake father and mother, and brethren and sisters, and houses and lands; nevertheless such tribulation would not go unrecognized or even unrewarded, both here and hereafter. John adds that the tribulation which many of them were *then* enduring was being endured patiently; that is, with brave and heroic steadiness, no complaint or repining, but patience and endurance not born of human nature, but as it were communicated by Jesus Christ himself. They were, after all, but walking in the path which their Master had trod before them. What a comfort that we may look to Jesus, who for our sakes “endured the cross, despising the shame,” and who in this respect is “the author and finisher of” (that) “faith” which endured steadfast to the end.

3. In the isle of Patmos.—At this time John is supposed to have been in banishment from Ephesus, where for many years he had been the pastor and possibly the bishop of the wide district surrounding that chief city. Some have contended that he was even a slave in the galleys or in the mines, but this does not appear from anything which is said, either in this or in any other book of the New Testament. The apostles were all sufferers for Christ’s sake and the Gospel’s, but they did not spread abroad their sufferings or make a spectacle of them, even when it was necessary to allude to them. This is a part of patient endurance, which becomes God’s servants and the disciples of Christ. (Is. liii, 7.) “If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.” (I. Pet. ii, 20.) These were those to whom this revelation was directed, who were, with John, suffering patiently for the sake of Christ and his kingdom, for which Jesus gave them words of commendation. (Rev. ii, 2; iii, 10; xiii, 10; xiv, 12.) It is equally pleasing to Christ if we thus take patiently the ordinary afflictions and trials of life. We have all of us thus an opportunity of being true companions of these early (and some later) witnesses for Jesus.

John tells us distinctly that he was at that time in the isle of Patmos "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." Not for the purpose of preaching and testifying the Gospel there; but because he *had* preached and testified the word of God and given testimony for Jesus, he had been sent to the island as a punishment by the world-power which then surrounded the churches and persecuted believers, especially those who were conspicuous leaders. It is our privilege to be intimately associated with our Lord himself in thus faithfully witnessing for him, even at the hazard and actual experience of persecution. He was the great witness for God. (John xviii, 37; I. Tim. vi, 13; Luke xxiv, 48; Rom. viii, 17; II. Tim. ii, 12.)

4. "In the Spirit."—He describes the state of mind he was in at the time the revelation came to him. "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." When one is in an ordinary and normal state of consciousness, he holds intercourse with the external world through the medium of the senses; but on this day he was, so to speak, transported out of his ordinary senses, and, without the intervention of them, was in a kind of rapture which enabled him to hold intercourse with that world which is not perceived by the senses. In such a state was Paul, "whether in the body . . . or whether out of the body" he knew not. (II. Cor. xii, 2.) It was a state of consciousness which rendered him peculiarly fit to receive communications from God, or to look into mysteries which are hidden from those of us who can only obtain knowledge of things through our senses. (I. Cor. xiv, 2; Ezek. ii, 2.) This is the prophetic state of mind, that state of mind in which the spirit of man and the Spirit of God commune directly with each other, and not by means of the physical organs. This is one of the strong testimonies to the essential independence of the spirit of man, from his present bodily condition. This bodily condition is not necessary either to existence or to consciousness. It was on the Lord's day, the day made sacred forever by his resurrection from the dead, and which gradually superseded the old Jewish Sabbath as the day consecrated to God and rest.

II.—WHAT HE SAW AND HEARD.

While in this state of rapture from the bodily senses he heard a great voice behind him, as the voice of a trumpet. This voice arrested his attention, and he listened to hear what it would say, much as Moses while in his natural state of consciousness saw the wonders of the Bush that burned and was not consumed. (Ex. iii, 2, 3.)

1. What he heard.—What he heard was this: (i) “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.” The commentary on this designation which the mysterious Speaker used of himself is to be found in the eighth verse of this chapter, and also at the twelfth and thirteenth verses of the twenty-second chapter. It is one of those designations by which God describes himself as the all-inclusive being. Before him there is nothing, and beyond him there is nothing. It is the equivalent to that other mysterious name of God: “I AM THAT I AM.” (Ex. iii, 14; Is. xlv, 6.) It was now clear to John that the being who was speaking with him was none other than God himself. The identification of this being with Jesus is the clear proof of his Godhead. For a mere creature, however great and good, to have taken this title would have indeed been a blasphemy which would have justified the Jews in rejecting him and even in putting him to death. Though as to his human nature or his manifestation in incarnation he is said to have proceeded forth from the Father, he yet was so “one with the Father” in the essence of his being that he was God in all fullness. (ii) He next received this great commission: “What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia.” This communication was all so quickly given, that, as it were, filled with awe, John did not look about him, or make any attempt to see who it was that was speaking. But now came a pause, as if inviting him to turn about and see, which he then did.

2. What John saw.—Turning about to see, there rose upon his vision a sight which was at once a symbol and a glory, which entered deeply into the later communications which he received, and formed the basis of the whole Revelation. (i) The seven golden candlesticks. We are at once reminded of the golden candlestick which formed a part of the furniture of the tabernacle in the wilderness (Ex. xxv, 31, 32), but more especially of the vision of the golden candlestick seen by Zechariah and recorded in the fourth chapter of his prophecy. We know that these candlesticks were the symbolic representations of the seven churches to whom the message was to be sent. God’s people are his light-bearers, and the churches of Christ are especially the great lights of the world—not that they are lights in themselves, but that they give forth the light of him who is “the Light of the world.” That they are golden candlesticks is the declaration of the new nature which all believers have received from the Lord. These candlesticks seem to have been individual, and not collective (as was the candlestick in the tabernacle). This may suggest the autonomy of the individual churches, as over against the idea of an

ecclesiastical and organic unity of the congregations as under modern episcopal order. (ii) John saw walking in the midst of these candlesticks "one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle." "The Son of man" indicates who this glorious person was (Dan. vii, 9-13; x, 5, 6; Matt. xxvi, 64); and his position in the midst of the candlesticks shows Christ's relation to the churches—*always* with them, *always* in their midst, their true Head and Shepherd. He is not far away from his churches, though he is, as to his glorified body, in heaven. "Lo, I am with you alway." (Matt. xxviii, 20.) (iii) The appearance of the Son of man. (a) His clothing denoted his kingly and priestly office: the garment flowing from the shoulders to the feet was the robe of the high-priest, and the golden girdle was the badge of a king. Christ is both Priest and King to his people, and even makes them so also in their union and identification with him. (v. 6.) He is in the midst of his Church to intercede for it, and to defend and rule over it. The same is true of the relation of Christ to every and each individual believer. (b) "His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow." This is symbolic of his eternity and the purity of his glory. We easily identify this appearance both with "the Ancient of Days" of Daniel (vii, 9), and the glorious radiancy which we saw in connection with his transfiguration. (Matt. xvii, 1-5.) (c) "His eyes were as a flame of fire." Here we have searching omniscience. His message to the churches was one of rebuke and judgment. Their spiritual condition was perfectly known to him. His eyes pierced to the thoughts and intents of their hearts, and their whole state was naked and exposed to his sight. (Heb. iv, 13.) (d) "And his feet like unto fine brass." Here we have strength and stability. The great image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his vision had feet part of iron and part of clay, denoting weakness and powerlessness to tread down his foes. But Christ is full of strength and power, and when he walks forth to conquer and subdue there will be no weakness in his feet. (Ps. lx, 12; Is. lxiii, 6; Dan. x, 6.) (e) "His voice as the sound of many waters." This seems to denote the authority of Christ's word throughout the whole world. As the voice of the many oceans of the earth is heard lapping all the shores of every land and nation, so the voice of Christ, like water, breaks upon all shores, and comes with authority to all the nations of the earth; first in good tidings, and after in judgment. The later revelations in this book will show the significance of this symbol. (f) "And he had in his right hand seven stars." These were probably

strung as on a bracelet, or necklacc, or a chaplet. The meaning of these, as of the seven candlesticks, is expounded to us by Christ himself. "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." (v. 20.) These angels can mean nothing else than the pastors or overseers of the churches, to whom the revelation was to be committed by John, and who were in Christ's hands, as in his power and authority, who would hold them to an account for their stewardship. (I. Cor. iii, 7-15; II. Cor. vi, 1-4.) (*g*) "And out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword." This symbolizes the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit, and which is the searcher of all hearts (Heb. iv, 12), and the rule by which the judgment of Christ will be administered. (John xii, 47-50.) (*h*) "And his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." There is no description of the features of Christ, only a general impression of the glory of it. It cannot be described; but this appearance seems identical with the appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration. (Matt. xvii, 2.) For the whole appearance of this vision of the glory of Christ the reader is referred to the tenth chapter of Daniel, with which it may be profitably compared. Perhaps John had this, together with the transfiguration vision, in mind when he wrote his Gospel after this, in which he says: "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father." (John i, 14.)

3. The effect of the vision upon John.—When John saw this glorious vision, the effect of the dazzling glory of it, and the conviction that he was in the immediate presence of God, was so great that he fell at his feet as dead. He had once before experienced the same thing (Matt. xvii, 6), though this time the effect was more marked. Before they had simply been afraid; now here, alone with this superior glory, he fell down as dead. The effect upon a sinful man, when he first gets a glimpse of the glory of the Redeemer and the fact of his true Godhead, is to send him to lie at his feet. How can a sinful man behold the glory of God and live? (Luke v, 8.)

4. What Jesus said and did to John.—The first thing Jesus did was to reassure his servant. He laid his hand upon him, and said, "Fear not." This is the word of merciful assurance and comfort which rings throughout the whole Gospel. When a man is at the feet of Jesus, sinner though he may be, the only word which Jesus will say is one of hope and encouragement: "Fear not." The laying of his hand upon him was a sign of fellowship and tender power put forth to save. (Matt. viii, 3; Mark i, 40; Luke v, 13.) He now explains to John who he is, as if to give a double assurance, by symbol and by word. (*i*) He repeats that he is "the first and

the last," thus claiming for himself the Godhead. (ii) Lest John should mistake by this, and think that he was not the Saviour whom he had known in the flesh, he assures him that he is the same who "was dead," but now further that he "is alive forevermore, Amen." This is surely true. Then he tells him that he has the keys of death and hell, that is, the grave. This is only a repetition of what he had told his disciples at the time he gave them their commission to preach the Gospel. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." To this is now added that he holds absolutely the authority over death and the underworld. By his death and resurrection he triumphed over both death and the grave, and has, as the Son of man, absolute authority here as well as in earth and in heaven. He has power to redeem men from death and the grave, and he has power to cast men into hell through death and the grave. He only is possessed of this power. (iii, 7; ix, 1; xx, 1.)

5. John's commission.—Christ now bids John to write what he had "seen, and the things which are"; that is, what these things signify which he had just now seen, and which *are* as he had seen them; namely, the truth of Christ's proper deity and his relation to the churches and the pastors; his disposition toward those servants of his, who, like John, fall at his feet; of the fact of his survival from death, and his "evermore" life as the Son of man; his possession of the keys; and also "the things which shall be hereafter"; that is, those things which later on Christ would show him as about to come to pass. Then follows the interpretation of that part of the symbolic vision which relates to the church and the ministers, the candlesticks and the angels, which we have already noticed. This symbolic vision must be carried in mind all through the book as a key with which to help us to unravel the mystery and divine riddle contained in the succeeding chapters of this wonderful book. Only the intimate knowledge of the Word and the Spirit of God can enable us to do this.

LII.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS.—Matt. ii, 1-11.

(1) Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, (2) Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. (3) When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (4) And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. (5) And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, (6) And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. (7) Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. (8) And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. (9) When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. (10) When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. (11) And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.—Matt. ii, 1-11.

The birth of Jesus Christ seemed to set heaven and earth in motion around him. Angels from the skies came to announce his birth, and filled the earth with a new song. Stars moved in their courses to guide wise men from the East to his feet. Shepherds and astrologers, holy men of Judea of lowly birth, and wise men from the East of exalted position, alike led by a Providence working from within and from without, came to worship him. The worldly old Idumean king "is moved with fear," and all Jerusalem, instead of rejoicing with the men from the East, are stricken with fear like the tyrannical king. Faith is represented by a small company of Gentiles, while orthodox Judea is asleep in its unbelief, and awakened in terror at the news that their long-expected king was born amongst them. The wily old king who sat on David's throne sought to murder the new-born King of the Jews, but holy angels interposed to defeat his purpose. All through this chapter we have the beginning of that divine tragedy which culminated on the cross, and was glorified by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The present

season, full of festivity and joy throughout the world, is, after nearly twenty centuries, the echo of the angel's song, and the memory of the gifts of the wise men; for when we give our gifts to our children, is it not that we lay at the feet of Jesus a grateful tribute of gratitude for the joy which his coming into the world brought to us all?

I.—CIRCUMSTANCES CONNECTED WITH HIS BIRTH.

It is somewhat remarkable that in this Gospel, which was written by a Jew especially to demonstrate that Jesus was the true Messiah, the long-expected theocratic King of the Jews, his birth is announced to the nation by wise men from the East—that is, by Gentiles; while the third Gospel, written to show that Jesus was the Saviour of the *whole world*, the Son of Adam rather than the Son of Abraham, was written by a Gentile, and we see Jesus introduced by holy but humble men of the Jewish nation, the shepherds of Bethlehem. This is only another proof of that grace of God which is no respecter of persons. The Gentiles shall be ministers of grace to the Jews, and the Jews shall share with the Gentiles that salvation which has been prepared from of old.

1. The place of our Lord's birth.—The little town or hamlet of Bethlehem Judah was scarce worth a place among the cities of the land, yet out of this small and insignificant town of less than six hundred inhabitants at the time of our Lord's birth, came the world's Redeemer. If Nathanael asked Philip: "Can any *good* thing come out of Nazareth?" some might ask: "Can any *great* thing come out of Bethlehem?" Long centuries ago the prophet Micah had indicated to the ancient people that this little village should be the birth-place of their Messiah, as it had been the birthplace and home of their great king David. The passage in Micah (v, 2) reads as follows: "But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Matthew gives us a free translation of it at the sixth verse of our portion: "And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel." This little village was not mentioned in the hundreds of towns at the time of the partition of the land; it was the least among the thousands: that is, among the villages or cities where dwelt the heads of the

thousands, into which number the children of Israel had been divided for the purpose of government, Bethlehem was the very least, and yet it was not too small for God to honor by making it the birthplace of the world's Redeemer. It had before been the birthplace of David. The worth, dignity, and greatness of a place do not depend on the greatness of its population or the vastness or size of its buildings. The small town of Stratford-on-Avon is more famous as being the birthplace of Shakespeare than Manchester is for being the greatest manufacturing city in the world. Bethany, the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus, is better known than many an ancient city in which kings have lived and had their palaces. True greatness does not depend on worldly importance. David, the shepherd-lad of Bethlehem, was the youngest and least of the sons of Jesse, and not thought worthy even to be brought in with his brothers; yet God had chosen him. The manger in the caravansary was a mean place for one to find lodgings in, and yet here the Son of God found a birthplace. This world is almost the least among the planets, and yet God has selected it to be the theater on which he has displayed the wonders of his love and where he has wrought out the mystery of the ages. We should learn not to despise a man either because he is small or mean in outward appearance, or poor in worldly goods, nor to look for the true greatness of anything in the mere externals. Bethlehem and Nazareth, the one a small town and the other a village of vile reputation, are really the two towns which have received more honor from God than Jerusalem itself.

2. The visit of the wise men.—"Behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem." Who these wise men were, and from whence they came, has been the occasion of endless speculation. Tradition has determined that there were three of them, and has even assigned names to them: Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar. It has assigned to them the title and dignity of kings, and has determined that they came from Arabia, Mesopotamia, Persia, India, Egypt, and even Greece. Of these particulars we can know nothing certainly. That they were "magi," or "astrologers," or "magicians," this we know. They belonged to a sacred caste of scholars and priests of the East who made the study of the heavens their chief occupation, and because of their real or supposed knowledge of the stars, and what their movements portended to the inhabitants of the earth, were held in high repute by the people, and were made the instructors and advisers of kings. Every court had a company of these men about it, to whom the dreams of the kings and all difficult questions were referred. (Dan. ii, 48; iv, 9; v, 7, 11.) While

many of these magi or wise men were but charlatans trading on the superstitions of the people, as were James and Jambres who contended with Moses in Egypt, as was Simon Magus (or the magician) who pretended conversion at Samaria, there were among them devout souls who, from their habit of looking up into the heavens, had come to believe in and fear God, whom they perceived to be beyond the stars. We may confidently believe that these wise men who came seeking for Jesus were men in whom the spirit of Christ dwelt, though they were ignorant of it; men who, though they were uninstructed in the mysteries of God's revelation, had yet received a revelation of God from himself, even though it came through a star, which in due time led them to the feet of Christ. In every nation there are those who have feared God and wrought righteousness, and have been accepted with him. I have met in this strange country (India), during the past year, wandering fakirs nominally belonging to both the Hindoo and the Mohammedan religions, who were real seekers after God; whose spirits were chaste and humble; who had long since eschewed idolatry and the harsh tenets of Islam, and were striving through nature to reach up to nature's God. These wise men from the East had been led of God by his inward and outward cords to come from their distant home to Jerusalem in search of the new-born King.

3. The born King of the Jews.—The wise men came to Jerusalem asking of those whom they met here and there, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" It must have been a great surprise and shock to them when they reached Jerusalem to find the entire population ignorant of the birth of their King; and not only ignorant but quite asleep and non-expectant, while they, who were but Gentiles and strangers, had for months been journeying toward his birthplace, led by a star. We oftentimes find the grossest unbelief where we naturally look for faith. Jesus found more unbelief in his home-town of Nazareth than he did in the cities of semi-pagan Samaria. The people of Jerusalem, even the very high-priest and other rulers, murdered him, while publicans and harlots received him. A blind beggar recognized in him the Son of God, while the Pharisees only saw in him an impostor and blasphemer. We often find the worst infidelity in a Christian home, while faith springs up in the most unpromising places. There was at that time reigning over Jerusalem a foreign king, Herod, surnamed the Great, an Idumean by birth, though he was externally a Jew. He did not come of the stock or lineage of David, and was on the throne only by the power of Rome, the hated Gentile oppressor of the Jews. But now

there had come one in accordance with a long line of prophecies, who was the born King of the Jews, the long-expected Messiah. Jesus is that Shepherd whom God has sent into the world to be the ruler and governor of his people. We love to think of him as the Saviour of sinners, who, by his voluntary death, hath redeemed us from sin and the curse of the law; but he is also the royally born king of his people, with all power in heaven and in earth, not only to rule and reign *over* them but *with* them also. He was rejected both as Saviour and king by the Jews, and he is so by the many to-day; but he is nevertheless the born King of the Jews, and he will yet appear in power and great glory and rule over this earth—over his enemies with a rod of iron; over his friends and followers with the mild scepter of righteousness and peace. In the mean time he gives us salvation.

4. **“We have seen his star.”**—Here again we have a puzzle which has given rise to endless speculation. What was this star, and how could it guide them? or how, in the first place, could they know that it pointed to the birth of Jesus the King of the Jews? How could they follow it to Jerusalem and afterward to Bethlehem? The nearest star is so remote from the earth that it could not possibly be a guide to any one to any particular locality on the earth. Stars indeed may guide the mariner by showing him which way is north, south, east, or west, but he could not sail by it to any particular spot except by taking a general direction. Eminent astronomers from the days of Kepler down have tried to identify this star with some phenomena in the heavens which appeared about that time. That there were several remarkable astronomieal wonders in the sky about that time is fully ascertained, but that any one of them can be identified with the star of the wise men (the star of Bethlehem) is more than doubtful. Why must it have been a star at all, in the ordinary sense? Why may it not have been a miraculous point of light, hanging low in the heavens, first appearing to these devout men in the east, and then moving forward toward the west, steadily guiding them, first to Judea and Jerusalem, and then to Bethlehem? Must we reject as absurd or even improbable such a miracle? When the Holy Spirit fell upon the people, God gave an accompanying sign in the “tongues like as of fire,” just as before there was a strange appearance as of a dove resting on the head of Jesus when he was baptized in Jordan. Why may not God have set a point of light low in the heavens, first to arrest the attention of these wise men, and then lead them forward? Did not God give to the children of Israel a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to

guide them? Did he not manifest himself to Moses in the burning bush? Why should he not do another wonder? The whole sphere of the divine activity at this particular time was pregnant with supernatural wonders. Why may this star not have been the guiding angel, or of the same order as he who appeared to the shepherds, and in the night, as he moved forward, seemed to these astronomers of old to be a star? We think this is the more reasonable solution. But how came these wise men to know anything of the coming into the world of Jesus Christ; and how did they come to associate the appearance of the star with that expectation? It must be remembered that God has had in all the ages of the world men in all nations who have dimly known and truly worshiped him: Gentiles, in whose hearts the Light of the world has shined; men like Job, Jethro, Naaman, and even Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus. Nor must it be forgotten that during the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, and through the earlier dispersion of the ten tribes throughout the East, there had gone forth among those distant nations much knowledge concerning the expectation of the coming of the Messiah. Even here in far-away India I have come across many things which point indubitably to the fact that prophetic knowledge of Christ has been in this land for many centuries, and not only knowledge, but here we find unmistakable evidences of the impact of Jewish customs. Together with this knowledge of the expected birth of a heaven-sent king in Judea, there was a longing among many of the ancient wise men for a deliverer. God used all these circumstances, and by his Spirit led these men, in connection with the star, to conclude that it was his sign, and so they followed it. Our star is the Holy Scriptures, which are always shining as in the heavens above us, and which, if we follow them, will lead us to Jesus. God's Holy Spirit works with his Word in those who are devoutly looking and longing for salvation.

5. **“And are come to worship him.”**—There are many who make inquiry concerning Jesus; but their inquiry is curiosity only. These men inquired concerning Jesus because they had come to worship him. The Jews made many inquiries of the prophets, and had much knowledge of him—more than these wise men had; but they never found Jesus, because they had no purpose or desire to worship him. Jesus is revealed not to “the wise and prudent,” who merely desire knowledge, but to those simple-hearted babes among men who long for salvation and are ready to worship at his feet.

II.—HEROD AND JERUSALEM.

The advent of the wise men into Jerusalem, their insistent inquiries on every hand for the new-born King, taken together with their probably large and imposing train of camels, set the city talking and the people wondering. The news of the arrival of these Eastern princes, and the object of their visit, quickly penetrated to the palace, and smote Herod with fear.

1. Herod and Jerusalem troubled.—This usurping king was yet so much of a Jew that he knew well the prophecies concerning the coming of Christ. He knew well also that he was not a king according to the strict letter of the Jewish law. He did not belong to the royal line. He knew also (what was a fact) that the Pharisees particularly hated him and would seize on any pretext to dethrone him. The news of the birth of Christ was a menace to him, and he was troubled, and, for other reasons, all Jerusalem with him. There was something fearful and portentous to them in the fact that the Messiah had come. Why were they troubled? Were not all the theocratic hopes of the nation centered in him? Then why should they not rejoice? Because they were spiritually out of sympathy with the holy reign of righteousness that they knew he came to usher in. Jesus is coming again, according to many promises made by himself, his prophets, and apostles, and his coming again is the hope of the Church. Is it not likely that if the sign of the Son of man should appear in the heavens to-night a multitude of Christians (?) would be filled with fear, even many among those who are loudest in declaring their faith in the second advent? The promised King of the Jews was to be none other than God himself in the form and likeness of a man; but the cold and wicked hearts of these people were not prepared to receive and welcome God in their midst. This is why they feared.

2. Herod plans the death of Christ.—The wily old tyrant recognized all the danger there was to his throne in the appearance of the born King of the Jews. He was not a born king, and he knew full well that if the Son of David appeared he would have to abdicate. Perhaps skeptical of the real appearance of the new-born King, he yet felt that there would be danger to his throne if the belief should get abroad that Christ had come. Under a wily pretense of giving the desired information to the wise men and of desiring himself to see and worship the Messiah, if indeed he had come,

(i) He sent out and gathered together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, and demanded of them "where Christ should be born." Here was a strange mixture of appeal to the Scriptures even while murder was hatching in his heart. It is not seldom that we find this outward deference to God's Word while there is inward rebellion against his divine purposes. (ii) The testimony of the scribes and priests agreed that Bethlehem was the place where Christ should be born. Here was a greater marvel: that the very priests and doctors of the law should be compelled to testify to the coming of Christ and yet be destitute of any spiritual desire for it. This is an illustration of that dead orthodoxy which in all ages has been a curse in the Church of God. Of what good to us is it that we know the Scriptures if they do not lead us to Christ? What a contrast do we have here between the faith of Gentiles coming from afar to find and worship Christ, and the unbelief of the Jews and even their teachers, who, when Christ has come to them, know him not, neither do they go to worship him but only plot to destroy him! Again and again we see this thing. Many people who represent themselves to be Christians, who are indignant if the fact is questioned, who point to their church and to the fact that they are punctilious in the ceremonial performance of their duties, yet are the very worst enemies we have to contend with in the prosecution of our evangelistic work. Jesus in the church, Jesus in the Bible, Jesus in the prayer-book, they know all about; but Jesus in Bethlehem they will have none of. (iii) When Herod had gotten the information he sought from the scribes he turned to the wise men and made inquiry as to when the star first appeared. Though Christ had but just been born, the star announcing his birth had probably appeared months, even a year or two before, to these men, who had been following it till now; God having planned the appearance and suited it to the time which would be necessary for them to make the journey and find the new-born King. It was probably the statement of the wise men concerning the appearance of the star many months previous which led Herod to order all the children from two years old and under to be massacred. He would be sure to include the new-born King in this way in either case: whether the birth had taken place at the time of the first appearance of the star, or had but just now occurred. (iv) Then the wily king sent them away with the command to "search diligently" till they had found him, and to come again and bring him word, that he also might go and worship. Thus did the hypocrisy of Herod show itself. Hypocrisy is the dark shadow which follows faith. If there had not been true and simple faith in

the wise men, the hypocrisy of Herod would not have been aroused. If there had not been a superstitious faith in Herod's wicked heart (like unto that which the devils have), he would not have plotted the destruction of Jesus. Superstition makes men tremble at the presence of God, but it does not convert them to any spiritual faith in him.

III.—THE WISE MEN WORSHIPING.

After their interview with Herod, the wise men departed toward Bethlehem to find the child-King whom they had been seeking, and whose star had thus far led them to Jerusalem.

1. The reappearance of the star.—Whether they had lost sight of it of late, or whether it ceased to shine in and about Jerusalem, where there was no faith, but only dead orthodoxy concerning Christ, is not clear; but certain it is, as these simple-hearted wise men took up their journey toward Bethlehem, their guiding star reappeared in the heavens and moved on before them. Those who follow on to know the Lord he will never leave without a guide in the darkness. Perhaps this star was invisible to other eyes than theirs; just as many who read the Scriptures fail to see the divine light in them, while others, reading the same portion at the same time, see the light and are guided by it. Paul saw Jesus, but the soldiers who were with him saw him not; he heard the voice, but the soldiers heard it not. It is even so with men to-day. Some have eyes and see not, ears, and hear not, while others are filled with rejoicing and gladness at what their eyes see and their ears hear. The wise men rejoiced when they saw the star again which they had seen in the east, going before them. It led them not only to Bethlehem, but to the very house where Joseph had removed Mary and the young Child after his birth in the Khan. What an exceeding great joy there is in knowing that we are being led of God, and in being brought to the very object of our search and desire.

2. Steps in the journey of faith.—We are told that these wise men came, they saw, and then they worshiped. Thus must we, being led by the Word and Spirit, come to Jesus; and so coming, we shall see. "Come and see," said Philip to Nathanael. He came, and he saw for himself. But it is not enough to see, even; we must worship—that is, cordially accept the Son of God as our Saviour, and surrender ourselves to him. When Nathanael came to Jesus and saw him, he worshiped in a good confession, saying, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God."

3. The gifts of the wise men.—So soon as they were in the

house and saw the Child, they recognized and accepted him as the new-born King for whom they had been searching. Then they opened their boxes or bags and laid down before him their gifts. These gifts consisted of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. It is the custom of all Easterns thus to present gifts to those whom they desire to honor. These wise men were honoring Jesus with better things than even their costly gifts. They worshiped him. They poured out before him their hearts' faith and devotion. Innumerable ingenious guesses have been made as to what may have been the symbolic meaning of this threefold gift which was presented to Christ. Some have seen in it the symbol of the trinity; some, the threefold nature of man; some, the three great graces of faith, hope, and charity. These speculations are as idle as they are ingenious. Just let them stand for the desire on their part and ours to give to Jesus our best, yea, and all that we have. Let us first present ourselves living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service (Rom. xii, 1)—our whole spirits, souls, and bodies, which are rightfully his, because he has both created and redeemed us.

“Here I give my all to thee—
Talents, time, and earthly store,
Soul and body—thine to be,
Wholly thine, forevermore.”

LIII.

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