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SYNOPTICAL LECTURES
ON THE
BOOKS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.



SYNOPTICAL LECTURES
ON THE
BOOKS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

BY
DONALD FRASER, M.A., D.D.

AUTHOR OF
"METAPHORS IN THE GOSPELS," "SPEECHES OF THE HOLY APOSTLES," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

ZEPHANIAH—REVELATION.

VOL. II.

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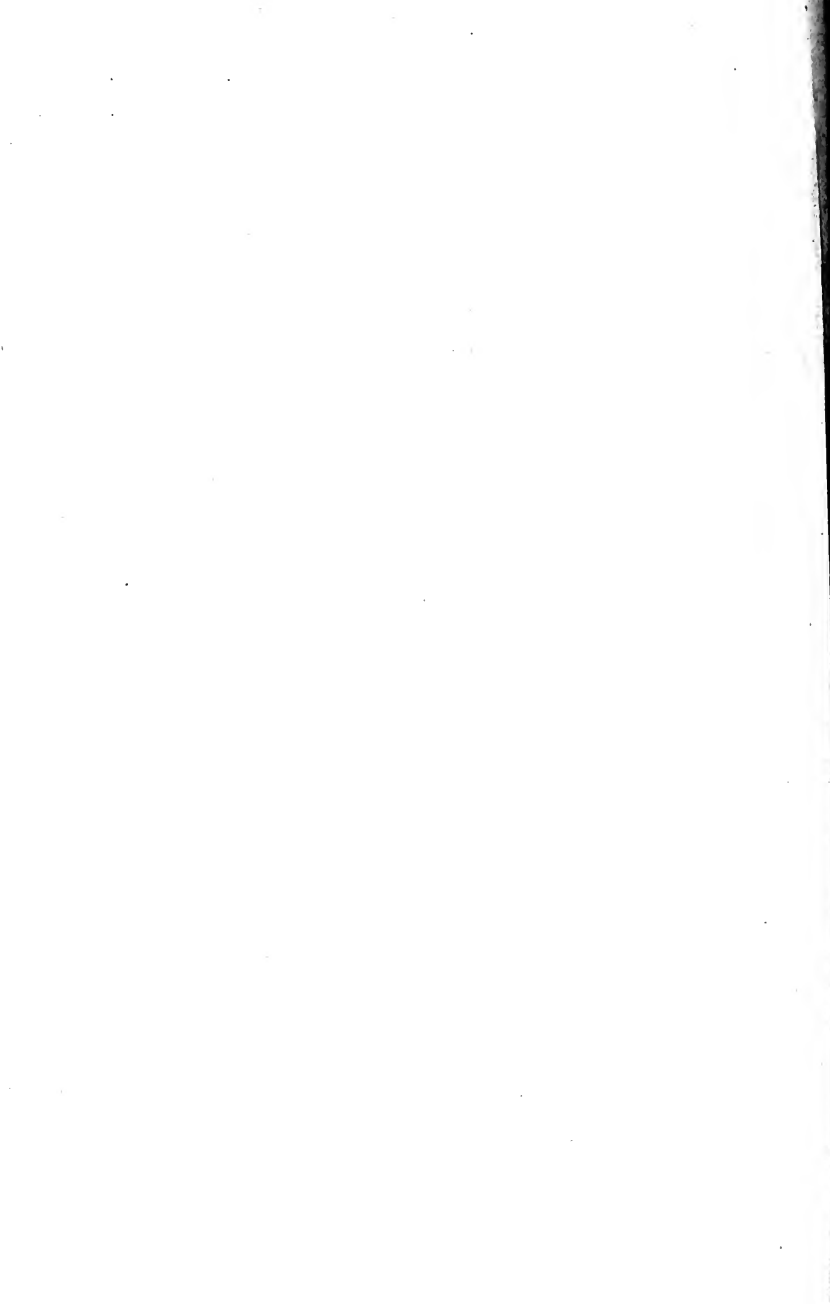
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SYNOPTICAL LECTURES.



ZEPHANIAH.

HABAKKUK lived probably in the reign of Josiah. Zephaniah did so to a certainty; and, with his contemporary Jeremiah, deplored the perversity of his countrymen, and foreboded their punishment.

The prophet gives his family descent for four generations; and if his ancestor Hizkiah or Hezekiah was, as is quite possible, the king of that name, he was of royal extraction. He does not, however, place before us his own personality in his writings, or even express his own thoughts and wishes. His book of prophecy throughout is spoken by Jehovah. It is most strictly "the word of the Lord which came unto Zephaniah."

A large portion of it is occupied with reproofs of sin and calls to repentance. From this we infer that Zephaniah prophesied before the reformation of worship enforced by King Josiah, or that the reformation did not deeply penetrate the national conscience. In Judah, the princes, priests, and people were corrupted in life, and prone to idolatry; so the contemporary prophets, who were faithful to God, were compelled to cry aloud against this obstinate degeneracy, and spare not. Jehovah was said to search Jerusalem with candles, that he might drag to light the proud and self-indulgent. Stern reproofs were given by the mouth of Zephaniah to the princes who wore a foreign dress and copied heathen manners, the merchants laden with silver, and the

voluptuaries who cast off the fear of the Lord. They were warned of a day of judgment drawing nigh. The fate foretold in Hezekiah's time had been postponed, but was not averted.

We shall not analyse this book in detail. Consisting as it does of reproofs to Jerusalem, and menaces to Judah and the neighbouring nations, it had a much stronger interest for the ancients, than it has for us. Yet it is only fair to Zephaniah to observe that he surpasses all the minor prophets in the comprehensive view which he takes of the Divine administration of the world, and that on his page truths appear which stretch across all dispensations. Some of these we shall point out.

I. A preacher of righteousness must go beneath the surface of human life. As a servant of the Lord who searched Jerusalem, Zephaniah detected and exposed the absence of faith and corruption of morals in all classes of Jewish society.

So did the greatest Prophet of all, and His forerunner. John the Baptist, the preacher of repentance, knew how to strike at the besetting sin of each class of men that came to him, and spared not. He did not say the same words to the people, to the publicans, and to the soldiers ; but had a special searching word for each.* The Lord Jesus, the master preacher of righteousness, was not satisfied with the outside of the cup and platter, but looked beneath the surface, and told men what was in their hearts ; exposing the hollowness of a religion of fasts, tithes, and prayers, while the heart was impure, and the life unrighteous.

Surely something like this is always essential to effective ministry. It must dive beneath the surface, and expose the secrets of the heart. Not content with a profession of religion, it must examine, or provoke self-examination, whether character is pervaded, and the conduct of life really influenced, by religious principle. It must search the visible Church, as the Lord searched Jerusalem with candles, and smite "the men who are settled on their lees," or who under a nominal Christi-

* Luke iii. 7-14.

anity conceal a moral laxity or a spiritual indifference. The Lord sent prophet after prophet thus to rebuke iniquity in Jerusalem, before it fell under the power of the Chaldeans : He renewed the same strain of prophetic warning through John the Baptist, and the Messiah, before the same city fell under the power of the Romans ; and doubtless He will revive the prophecy of reproof, the searching ministry of righteousness, and preaching of repentance, before there comes on Christendom the great and terrible day of the Lord.

Indeed, nowhere is the habit of speaking smooth things, and assuming the surface to be a faithful index of what lies beneath, more fallacious and injurious than in the moral and religious sphere. Many faces are but masks, and appearances proverbially deceive. Rich men are often very poor, and gay men very wretched. The sorrowful have inward joy ; and those who seem most prosperous are perhaps ill at ease, and full of foreboding. Rough men have tender hearts ; and soft-spoken people are hard and cruel. So also a form of godliness proves nothing. At the Lord's house, men worship idols of their own fancy ; and fresh from prayer, they devise mischief, and work wickedness. The servant of God must have eyes to see this, and a mouth to speak of this without fear of man.

Such a servant in Christian times was John Chrysostom, when with pungent eloquence, and at every risk, he denounced the corruption of Constantinople. Such was Bernard of Clairvaux, who during his whole life testified against the evils of his Church, and admonished the 'people, clergy, bishops, and popes themselves, with all plainness of speech. Such was Savonarola, who at Florence declaimed against the vices of all orders of men, and effected a wonderful though short-lived reformation of manners. Such was Latimer, who with a glorious courage exposed the Church superstitions, and preached the gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sins to London and to England. We want such ministry again, with discernment of the times, to weigh the prevailing religion justly, to expose fearlessly the evils, hypocrisies, and proud impieties that are

among us, and to cry aloud in the name of the Lord—"Repent ye"—"Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish."

II. There is wrath to come,—a great "dies irae." It stood before the eyes of Zephaniah—a dreadful vision. "The great day of Jehovah is near, and hastening greatly. A day of wrath is that day, a day of anguish and pressure, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness." * All Scripture speaks of the wrath as well as the mercy of God; His severity as well as His goodness; and the vista of the future, so far as concerns the impenitent, closes with "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his works." †

It is this passage of Zephaniah which suggested the famous old Latin hymn, referred to in a former lecture—"Dies irae, dies illa!" Its title is—"De novissimo Judicio;" and it describes the universal tremor at the appearing of the Judge. It cries for pardon of sin, and a place with Christ's sheep at His right hand. It was written in an age of little Christian light, being ascribed with probability to Thomas of Celano in the thirteenth century. Accordingly, it is scarcely a hymn to be sung by a child of God in whom perfected love has cast out the tormenting fear of judgment; but it is in fine harmony with the sombre language of the prophet, and seems to quiver before the indignation of the great and terrible God.

III. In time—not in eternity—God calls nations to account. This is largely illustrated in the greater prophets, especially Isaiah and Jeremiah; and it is intimated here more briefly by the predicted fate of the Philistines, Moabites, and Ammonites. For their inveterate hostility to Israel and Judah, these nations were to be overthrown and their territories laid utterly waste. Every one knows that this is come to pass. Philistia is a sparsely inhabited pasture-land, and the whole region of Moab

* Chap. i. 14-16.

† Rom. ii. 5, 6.

and Ammon lies desolate. Then, the area of judgment is shown to be more extensive, by the mention of two distant and powerful nations—Ethiopia in the south, and Assyria in the north-east, but reckoned by the Jews as in the north, because the invading armies of Assyria marched from north to south through Palestine. The sword of the Lord can reach Ethiopia. His hand can also destroy Asshur, and make Nineveh a barren waste, where wild animals roam, and the pelicans dwell in the ruined buildings of what was once a populous city. * Every one knows that this also has come to pass—evinced the power of the Lord to judge the strong nations as well as the feeble, and to abase those that walked in pride.

The New Testament says less of nations than the Old, and for an obvious reason. In the times before Christ, the people of God were a constituted nation with an earthly capital at Jerusalem, and an earthly inheritance in Canaan. In contrast with them, usually in hostility to them, stood other nations of the world. But now the people of God are constituted and united as the Church, chosen out of all nations without distinction, and spreading among all nations, having no earthly capital or boundary, and having an “inheritance laid up in heaven.” Therefore, there is not the same sharp and obvious contrast between the Church and the nations, as there was between Israel and the nations. The Church exists in this nation or that, and will reach into all nations. It does not resolve itself anywhere into a nation, but it influences and blesses by its presence every people among whom it has penetrated.

At the same time, since there is such a thing as national character, and national action cannot possibly be quite neutral or colourless in regard to morals and religion, but must either help or hinder the truth and Church of Christ; nations are, in this dispensation also, the subjects of a Divine scrutiny and judgment. This, too, may be traced along the course of history, and is not reserved to the great day. Just as of old time, God punished the nations very distinctly and severely, because of their hostility

* Chap. ii. 12-15.

to His people, so now He punishes nations sooner or later for persecuting His saints, hindering His Church, or giving favour and support to any doctrine or institution subversive of the truth as it is in Jesus.

Some men seem to hold that, because genuine Christian faith and experience must have their seat in the individual mind and heart, a nation as such cannot recognise or take anything to do with revealed religion. They bid the nation take care of itself, its property, liberty, and political position, religion being confined strictly to the individual and to the Church. But the action of a nation can never be thus limited; it cannot promote even its own interests without appealing to the principles which are inculcated in the Christian revelation; and it cannot avoid the friendly or unfriendly bearing of its laws, institutions, and functionaries towards Christ and the Church. For such bearing it is responsible to God. Let no one say that this is Old Testament doctrine inapplicable to a more spiritual dispensation. Among the last things revealed in that last book of prophecy which closes the New Testament, we find the kings and nations as such dealt with by Christ. The King of kings shall smite them, and rule them with a rod of iron. Nay, more, after the Millennium, nations, deceived by Satan, shall be punished for their hostility to the camp of the saints and the beloved city—“And fire came down out of heaven, and devoured them.”*

In what way or ways a nation may best serve Christ and the Church is a question of practical discretion which may be answered differently in different countries. What we protest against is the modern theory that a nation as such cannot recognise Christian truth, unless all the citizens are converted, and cannot sustain a religious obligation. A sure way, this, to impoverish national character, and degrade the whole conception of public duty.

IV. The happy issue of all the prophetic periods will be, that the Lord will dwell among His people. “Sing, O daughter of

* Rev. xix. 15, 16; xx. 7-9.

Zion ; shout, O Israel ; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, He hath cast out thy enemy : the King of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee ; thou shalt not fear evil any more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not ; and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty One who will save ; He will rejoice over thee with joy ; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing.” *

The Book of Zephaniah ends with an announcement of the ultimate restoration of the Jews, and of the Lord’s delight in His redeemed people. He will rest among them as Jehovah. Such is the view of this prophet, who speaks not of Messiah, but always of Jehovah and His chosen nation.

This, however, cannot be without blessing to the Gentiles also. The receiving of Israel will be to them as life from the dead. Then, the Lord Christ will dwell in His love, not among the Jews only, but among the Gentiles also ; and, as He died for them all, so will He joy over them all with singing. Thus the language proper to Judah is for us also the language of our most sacred hopes. We are come to Mount Zion with songs ; and as the children of Zion sing, lo ! the Mighty Saviour sings “in the midst of the congregation ;” He joys over them with singing.

* Chap. iii. 14-20.

H A G G A I.

As between Isaiah and Jeremiah, so also between Zephaniah and Haggai, there lies a gap of fully a hundred years. We have reached the first of those prophets who lived after the return of the Jews from their exile in Babylon, and who are usually styled the Prophets of the Restoration. Ezra and Nehemiah are the historians of the period; Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are the prophets.

Of this first of the three, nothing is known with certainty; though the Rabbinical tradition is very probably true, that Haggai was born in Babylon during the captivity, and went to Jerusalem with the first expedition of Jews, who returned to their own land under the decree of Cyrus. Like Habakkuk, he is styled "the prophet," and may therefore be supposed to have been well known for his prophetic gift; but this book consists simply of four addresses regarding the Temple, delivered by Haggai within the short space of three months.

We call them addresses. The prophet Haggai was no poet.* His style is animated, but not imaginative or exalted. He has no bold figures of speech, no visions, and no parables: but in a plain straightforward manner delivers his message from the Lord concerning the immediate duty of the Jewish settlers at Jerusalem, and the destined glory of the Temple which they had begun to build.

This was not a matter of patriotic interest merely, or even of

* True, that the names of Haggai and Zechariah are prefixed to certain of the later Psalms in the Septuagint version, and in the Peshito Syriac; but this probably means that those Psalms were introduced into the public service on their authority.

ordinary religious duty. The Temple occupied a position in that dispensation, which no earthly sanctuary can claim in the age of the Gospel. It was the authorised seat and centre of religious life and fellowship. The destruction of the Temple by the Babylonian army had been for the time a fatal blow to the sacred pre-eminence of Jerusalem. If, after such interruption, and the exile in Babylon, there was to be a real restoration of Jerusalem's pre-eminence, and a renewal of the Divine covenant with the Jews, it was essential that the Temple should be rebuilt; and that, in rebuilding it with their own hands, the people should practically and earnestly express their desire to be received again into fellowship with Jehovah, worshipping at His altar, and hiding under the covert of His wings.

The Book of Haggai consists, as we have said, of four addresses. They are divided thus:—

Chap. i. 1-11, with a notice of its effect, chap. i. 12-15.

Chap. ii. 1-9.

Chap. ii. 10-19.

Chap. ii. 20-23.

I. The first is spoken to Zerubbabel the prince of the house of David, and to the high priest Joshua. The one was the head of the government, having been appointed by the Persian monarch to be Pechâh or Pasha at Jerusalem; the other, as we should say, the chief ecclesiastic. The object of the address is to rouse those leaders and the people under them from a sort of apathy into which they had fallen regarding the erection of the Temple.

We know already from Ezra, that the adversaries of the Jews misrepresented their Temple-building to the king of Persia, and obtained an order to stop the work. At the death of this king, Artaxerxes, it was again open to the Jews to resume their building on the authority of the original decree of Cyrus; but the people had grown cold and timid, and wished to put off the work to a more convenient season. It was at this juncture that the voice of Haggai began to be heard.*

* See Ezra v. 1, 2.

The Jews pleaded inability to proceed further with so great an undertaking. The Lord asked by His prophet, whether it was a time for the people to seek their own ease, and neglect His Temple? They had made for themselves comfortable houses, and lived in dwellings which were covered in, and even elegantly finished. Was it fitting, that after the foundations of the Lord's House had been laid, it should have no completed walls, or protecting roof—a house lying desolate? The Jews were assured, that this neglect of the Temple, far from being a profitable course for themselves, really hindered the prosperity of their city. The only way to obtain the favour of their fathers' God was to resume the interrupted work—go to the mountain forest, bring wood, and build the house.

The good effect of this address is recorded in the end of the first chapter; also in the fifth and sixth chapters of Ezra. Within three weeks from the delivery of the message, the rubbish was cleared away, materials were collected, and the builders were actually engaged on the wall of the Temple.

II. The second address was designed to correct a tendency to discouragement and depreciation which began to appear. It was delivered to the same great officers as the first, the prince and the chief priest; and also to the people generally, described as the remnant or residue.

At the time when the foundations were laid, the old people who had seen the grandeur of the former Temple wept at the contrast. And now, again, after the first burst of enthusiasm for the work was past, discouragement crept over the citizens as they began to trace the proportions of the new building, and perceived how short it would come of the splendour of Solomon's Temple; and yet, further, how it would fail to realise those predictions of a house of God's glory which had issued from the fervent lips of Isaiah and Ezekiel,—“Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? and how do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes as nothing?” To correct this spirit of feebleness, Haggai was directed to assure the

Jews of the presence with them of the Lord of hosts: "Fear ye not."

The words which follow (chap. ii. 6-9) have engaged the attention of all careful students of the Bible; and, indeed, in these sentences lies the chief interest of the Book of Haggai. The prophecy of a universal shaking is quoted in the Epistle to the Hebrews—"He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven."* When Israel came to mount Sinai and received the law, the earth shook; but in a later age, not earth only, but heaven too, shall be shaken; the only unshakable thing being the kingdom given to the saints—"a kingdom that cannot be moved." This word, however, as originally spoken to encourage the Jewish builders, must be read as an assurance of the Divine power to prostrate those great forces of the world before which the Jewish remnant seemed so small and feeble. What if adversaries should deride their building, or hinder it; what if the new Persian king, Darius, whose disposition toward them had not yet been ascertained, should frown upon them? Jehovah of hosts was with them, and it was in His power, and in His purpose, to shake the nations. The Persian empire would fall before the Grecian. The Grecian would break into parts, and those parts would fall before one another, and before the Roman. The Roman, in its turn, would be shaken and broken up. Why, then, should the Jews be cast down or disquieted? Poor as their second Temple looked, it was acknowledged by the Almighty Jehovah, and had its part to play in the long preparation for that Kingdom which is to survive all kingdoms, and concerning which it had been already revealed, that "the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever." †

Then follows the promise—"And the desirable things of all nations shall come." Early interpreters referred this to the Messiah, and the influence of their interpretation may be seen in the Vulgate, and other versions. The erroneous rendering in

* Heb. xii. 26.

† Dan. vii. 18.

the English Authorised Version has been used without misgiving by preachers without number; and it is quoted as the foundation text of the interesting Hulsean Lectures for the year 1846 by Archbishop Trench, which are entitled, "Christ the Desire of All Nations; or, The Unconscious Prophecies of Heathendom." It is an attractive and profitable theme. But the plurals in the Hebrew leave no doubt about the meaning. What is promised is the homage of nations * bringing their treasures as gifts of goodwill to the House of the Lord in Jerusalem. †

It is true that the fulfilment of this word was hindered by the unbelief of the Jews. But the promise itself is not withdrawn: it is expanded and ennobled in the last and best vision of Jerusalem,—“The nations shall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day; for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it.” ‡

The question remains, What is the special glory promised to the second Temple in the words—“The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith Jehovah; and in this place will I give peace, saith Jehovah of Hosts”? It has been usually explained as a prediction that Messiah would come into that house; as indeed He did come into the Temple which had been enlarged and embellished by Herod the Great. Strict interpretation, however, must hold, that it is the glory and honour of the nations brought to Jerusalem which is to fill the Temple. This promise also, or this continuation of the promise regarding the treasures of the nations, the Jews did not obtain because of their unbelief. It is reserved for a future era when Jerusalem shall be holy. Only, it was undoubtedly a beginning of the blessing, when Immanuel was born, and brought into the Temple, where he was hailed as the con-

* Hitzig renders, “The pick of the nations shall come,” *scil.*, with offerings to the Temple.

† The parallel Scriptures are Isa. lx. 5-7; lxi. 6.

‡ Rev. xxi. 24-27.

solation and glory of Israel. Consequent on His appearing is the future glory of His kingdom, and the filling of holy Jerusalem with peace.

III. The third address consists of an appeal to the priests, and an instruction to the people. Its object is information and encouragement.

The priests, as appointed not only to conduct Divine service, but also to teach the law of God, were interrogated on two points; and their correct answers are recorded. To the first question they replied, that there could be no transmission of holiness from one object to another, or consecration by mere contact,—a principle that cuts deep into all ritualism. To the second they answered that pollution, or ceremonial uncleanness, could be transmitted, and in particular that it was incurred by contact with a dead body. Such was the law.

On the basis of these declarations, the prophet warned the people, that they and their city were not sanctified or protected by any outward observances whatever. On the contrary, they had incurred disfavour with God, and therefore had suffered “from blight, withering, and hail.” The Lord required of them to arise and build; and from the day on which they should put their hands zealously to the work of His house, He was ready to bless them with fruitful seasons.

IV. On the same day on which the third address was delivered to the people, the fourth was spoken to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, with a view to support the courage of that prince. Whatever shaking and overturning might ensue, he was not to fear, for the Lord would make him “as a signet ring” with which He would not part. It is a strong Oriental expression to denote what one holds precious, and will not put away or surrender, for no man of consequence in the East is ever without his signet ring.*

Zerubbabel represented the house of David which was never

* Compare Jer. xxii. 24-25.

to be forgotten before God, till Christ should come, the great Son of David, and Heir of the kingdom. This promise therefore is just a renewal of the all-important Messianic promise —“the sure mercies of David”—in the form and language appropriate to the period. “I have chosen thee, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord of Hosts,”* is tantamount to an assurance that the house of David, though reduced in dignity for a season, was not cast off, and that Messiah would come in the line of Zerubbabel. This we know to have been fulfilled, for that prince’s name appears in both the genealogies of Jesus, given by the evangelists Matthew and Luke.

Indeed Zerubbabel himself, in his great enterprise of building the Temple, is a sign of Jesus Christ, who builds on a rock His Temple, the Church. Adam suggests Him as the Covenant Head, Melchisedec as the royal priest, Isaac as the heir of promise, Joseph as the rejected one who became a prince and saviour, Moses as the redeemer and mediator, Joshua as captain of the host, David as the man of affliction and of victory, Solomon as the prince of peace, Jonah as the buried one who rose again, and so also Zerubbabel suggests and illustrates the position of our Lord as the Builder of the Church, which is the Temple of the Holy Ghost. This honour He took not to Himself ; but was chosen and called to it, like Zerubbabel ; and in it, He derives strength and comfort from the thought that He was not and is not left alone in the work ; that the Father who sent Him was with Him, and is with Him, doing all things by Him as the signet ring of supreme authority.

All the building of the Temple is ascribed to Zerubbabel. His hands laid the foundation, and his hands finished the house ; yet many willingly worked with and under him. So now, all the building of the divine Temple is by and of Christ

* This designation of God occurs with marked frequency in the books of the Post-Exilian Prophets. It marked the strong feeling of the restored Jews against idolatry. The nations worshipped the hosts of heaven : but they worshipped the Jehovah who made and ruled their stars in their array.

Jesus. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." But there are those who build with and under Christ. It is the highest position, and the noblest occupation to which we can aspire. By all means let us pray for the peace of Jerusalem; but let us do more,—put our hands to the work of building that holy and beautiful house which surpasses all earthly and material structures, because it consists of living stones in spiritual fellowship.

ZECHARIAH.

A VERY important book is before us; and one in which are some things hard to be understood.

Zechariah was contemporary with Haggai, and is mentioned along with him in the Book of Ezra. He took, however, a wider scope than that prophet, and a longer perspective. Haggai preached the duty of rebuilding the Temple. Zechariah, in order to instruct and inspirit the people, had night visions from the Lord, reaching far into the future of Judah and the nations, with glimpses of the Messiah to come, and of days of joy, peace, and holiness destined ultimately for Jerusalem.

Some have supposed that this prophet met a violent death, and that he is the "Zacharias, son of Barachias," whom our Lord mentions as having been "slain between the Temple and the altar!"* But it is far more probable that our Lord referred to the earlier prophet Zechariah, who was "stoned with stones at the commandment of the King Joash in the court of the house of the Lord."† To this it has been objected, that a prophet slain in the reign of Joash could not be spoken of as the last martyr in Jerusalem, because Manasseh afterwards filled the city with innocent blood. But the explanation is simple. The Second Book of Chronicles stands last in the Hebrew Bible, and the Zechariah mentioned in that book is the last-named witness for Jehovah who suffered death for his testimony. Our Lord, therefore, specified Abel and this Zacharias as the first and the last martyrs mentioned by name in the Old Testament Scriptures.

* Matt. xxiii. 35.

† 2 Chron. xxiv. 20-22.

The Book of Zechariah breaks into two at the close of the eighth chapter; and, like the Book of Isaiah, has been assigned by some critics to two different authors. But with this difference, that the second part is ascribed to an earlier, not a later, pen. It is regarded as a fragment of an unknown author of the times before the Captivity, which was appended to the Book of Zechariah, that it might not be lost. But there is no sufficient internal proof of this; and no external evidence whatever.

It certainly is strange that, the evangelist Matthew, citing a passage from the eleventh chapter of this book, attributes it to the prophet Jeremiah, "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of Him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me." * Some account for this as a mistake in transcription—a slip of the pen. Another and better explanation is, that the evangelist had in mind the writing of Jeremiah about the potter in the 18th and 19th chapters of his book; and, regarding Zechariah's mention of the potter's field as a continuation, gave, in the free inexact way in which evangelists and apostles quote the Old Testament, the name of the earlier and more important prophet to his reference.

Now of the scope and contents.

I. The first part—(chap. i.–viii.)—requires a careful analysis.

1. The introduction (chap. i. 1–6).—This is somewhat stern in tone. It recalls the disobedience of the former generation, and the consequent displeasure of God manifested in the downfall of Jerusalem, and in the long captivity of the Jews. From this, the people are warned not to be like their fathers, lest they should incur the same displeasure. "Return unto me, saith Jehovah of Hosts, and I will return unto you."

This warning, combined with the simultaneous exhortations

* Matt. xxvii. 9, 10.

of Haggai, produced a good effect. The people in Jerusalem turned to Jehovah, and resumed the building of His Temple. Five months after they had resumed it, the prophet Zechariah had in one night—

2. A series of visions, intended to console and encourage the feeble struggling colony of Jews.

(1.) The riders among the myrtle-trees (chap. i. 7-17).—The valley in which the low myrtle-bushes grew was, no doubt, a sign of the land of Judah under national depression, yet ever dear to God. The riders were the messengers of God sent out through the earth, to survey its condition, and to lead on the judgments with which it was to be shaken. They reported by their leader to the angel of Jehovah, who had led Israel through the wilderness and watched over them, that there were no signs of shaking—*i.e.*, the shaking of all nations predicted by Haggai. The whole earth was at rest. The Angel of Jehovah then pleaded for pity to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, and received from the Lord a favourable answer. On which, the prophet was directed by an interpreting angel, of whom we read again and again, to intimate the resolution of Jehovah to smite the secure nations, and show kindness to the cities in the Holy Land.

(2.) The four horns and four artisans (chap. i. 18-21).—The horn of course is the symbol of power. Four horns scattering Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem, are either to denote hostile powers from all quarters, or to correspond with the four empires in Daniel's vision. But God prepares a smith to "fray" each horn; *i.e.*, a power to quell and affright each and all of the world-powers that "lifted up the horn over the land of Judah."

(3.) The man with the measuring-line (chap. ii.)—The Jews were discouraged by the contrast between the city they were rebuilding and that in which their fathers had dwelt, as well as by the contrast between the Temple of Zerubbabel and that of Solomon. But this vision gave assurance, that Jerusalem should yet have a wider extent than ever it had known, and should be safer than ever it had been; for Jehovah would be

“a wall of fire round about, and the glory in the midst of her.” Zion is called to rejoice over this prospect; and all flesh is to “be silent before Jehovah, because He is arisen from the habitation of His holiness.”

(4.) Joshua the high priest before the Angel of Jehovah (chap. iii.)—In order to the establishment of Jerusalem in the Divine favour, there must be a removal of iniquity; and to meet anxiety of conscience on this score was this fourth vision given. The very priesthood, emphatically called to represent the holiness of Israel, was chargeable with sin. Satan, as accuser, hungering for the condemnation of the guilty, stood at the right hand of the high priest, according to that Jewish custom which placed the accuser at the right hand of the accused.* But the Lord freely justified Joshua, and the people of Jerusalem represented by him; forgiving their sin, and, by a change of Joshua’s raiment, intimating their acceptance in His sight. So Satan was rebuked by this act of free grace to the “brand plucked out of the fire,” † *i.e.*, to Joshua and the remnant rescued from Babylon, restored from the captivity.

Then followed an address to Joshua in regard to the walk, or course of conduct, befitting a judge in God’s house. With this, too, there was a brief promise of the Messiah, under the name already given by Isaiah and Jeremiah, the Sprout or Branch from the genealogical tree of David. And then was set before the high priest a stone watched over by seven protecting eyes. It was to be carved and placed in the Temple as the “headstone.” ‡ The chapter ends with a prospect of peace and prosperity. “In that day, saith Jehovah of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig-tree.”

(5.) The candle-stick and two olive-trees (chap. iv.)—The candlestick itself, or rather the lamp-stand, is suggested by that

* See Psalm cix. 6.

† This expressive figure occurs in an earlier prophet. See Amos iv. 11.

‡ Chap. iv. 7, 10.

which used to stand in the holy place; but the pipes for conducting the oil, and the olive-trees for supplying it, are additions in the vision.

The people of God were yet to shine in His light. The power so to shine was to be imparted, not by might or power, but by the secret supply of holy oil—the Spirit of the Lord. The ministration of the Spirit was to be through the two olive-trees, or “sons of oil,” *i.e.*, through the kingly and priestly institutions, at this time represented by Zerubbabel and Joshua, and afterwards to be united for ever in the Messiah.

The fourth and fifth visions are of great value to the Church, and are often expounded in her pulpits. The former teaches the great doctrine of justification by grace; the latter that of sanctification and power for service, or of life and light in the Spirit.

(6.) The flying roll (chap. v. 1-4).—It is a solemn warning of the curse of God upon thieves and perjurers; and, the size of the roll corresponding exactly with the dimensions alike of the holy place in the Tabernacle and of the porch of Solomon’s Temple, intimated that judgment would be meted out to sinners in Jerusalem according to no common standard, but the very measure of the holy place or holy calling of Israel.

(7.) The woman in the ephah (chap. v. 5-11).—This was for encouragement in reformation of life. Wickedness personified was removed from the land of Israel,—borne far away to the land of Shinar, a distant region, as the sins of Israel were carried away by the scape-goat into the wilderness. But the sin was not forgiven; it was judged and punished, having a weight of lead cast upon it. And the transfer was not to the desert or land of forgetfulness in which forgiven sin is lost, but to Shinar as the seat of the Tower of Babel, and the sign of that future Babylon in which the woman Wickedness has her seat—“the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.”

(8.) The four chariots (chap. vi. 1-8).—These were the signs of coming events among the powers of the world. The

number, four, always stands for world-universality. The chariot horses expressed by their colour the course of history. Red spoke of war; black, mourning and death; grisled bay (piebald or roan?) probably pestilence and varied judgment; white, victory. The going forth of the black horses, and the white after them, into the north country, implied the fall of Babylon; which city, about three years after this vision, revolted against the Persians, and was completely destroyed by Darius. The fall of Babylon was the good news of judgment in the Old Testament, as the fall of mystic Babylon is the good news of judgment in the New.

So end the visions. Perhaps the sixth and seventh should be counted one; and, if so, the series was complete in seven.

3. A symbolic crowning of the high priest (chap. vi. 9-15).—A deputation of Jews had arrived from Babylon with an offering of silver and gold for the Temple.* The prophet was directed to take them with him, and, making crowns of the precious metals, to place them on the head of Joshua the high priest. These crowns were afterward to be laid up in the Temple. This is full of Messianic promise. A high priest of Israel never was entitled to wear a crown; and Joshua got this distinction only as a sign of the Christ, the man whose name is the Branch or Offspring of David, and in whom the priestly and kingly offices are combined. "Behold the Man whose name is the Branch, and He shall grow up out of His place, and He shall build the Temple of the Lord: even He shall build the Temple of the Lord; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both."

4. A didactic passage, delivered two years after the preceding exhortations and visions (chaps. vii., viii.)

From Bethel, messengers came to the priests and prophets of Jerusalem. In the authorised version Bethel is translated "the house of God," as if the messengers came from the

* See Haggai ii. 8.

Temple ; but this cannot be, for the Temple is always Beth-Jehovah, never Beth-El. The question proposed by the men of Bethel was, whether the days of mourning and fasting for the destruction of Jerusalem were still of obligation. Zechariah received an answer for them from the Lord, and delivered it not to them only but to "all the people of the land and the priests." The message is in four parts :—

(1.) It is taught, that God regarded not at all these fasts of the Jews, but required obedience to His word (chap. viii. 4-7).

(2.) It is taught, as formerly and fully by Isaiah, that the Lord took pleasure in justice and mercy ; and that it was not for non-observance of fasts, but for their moral degeneracy, that He had punished their fathers (chap. vii. 8-14).

(3.) It is promised that the Lord will now favour Jerusalem ; and the people are exhorted to proceed with the building of the Temple, and to put evil away from among them (chap. viii. 1-17). "As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I repented not ; so again have I thought in these days to do good unto Jerusalem and the house of Judah ; fear ye not. These are the things that ye shall do : speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour ; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates ; and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour ; and love no false oath ; for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord."

(4.) It is promised that the fast days which the Jews of their own accord had appointed, shall be turned into happy feast days ; and all nations shall cling to them, sharing their blessings, and seeking among them the knowledge of God. This reaches forward into the times of Christ, and is already in part fulfilled. The Israelites have affected all nations for good, and will do so yet more powerfully ; because "to them pertain the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." *

* Rom. ix. 4.

II. The second part—(chaps. ix.–xiv.) is, throughout, prophetic without visions; and some passages are very deep. The arrangement, however, is easy enough. We find two oracles, each occupying three chapters.

1. The burden of the word of the Lord in the land of Hadrach (chaps. ix.–xi.)—The name occurs in Assyrian inscriptions as that of a district between Damascus and Hamath; as indeed is indicated in the text of Zechariah.

The beginning of the ninth chapter foretells, with wonderful precision, the conquering march of Alexander the Great along the Phœnician and Philistine shore. The old Tyre had been on the mainland; but, after its capture by Nebuchadnezzar, the Phœnicians rebuilt the city on an island about half a mile from shore, and with high walls made it apparently impregnable. There they accumulated riches—"gold as the mire of the streets"—and, sitting secure, they defied the might of Alexander. The great Macedonian, however, seized on the ruins of old Tyre on the mainland, ran a mole from the shore to the island with prodigious labour, and, after a siege of seven months, took the city and burnt it—thus, against all probability, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah to the very letter. From Tyre the conqueror marched along the coast, and destroyed the once powerful cities of the Philistines. But to Jerusalem and its Temple he did no hurt, as is here foretold.* The daughter of Zion was to rejoice, for to her the Messiah would come. His entrance would not be like that of Alexander. He would ride, not on a war horse, or in a chariot, but on a young ass in lowliness, as the promised King of Judah and Jerusalem.†

The rest of the ninth chapter (ver. 11–17) is supposed to point to the successful wars of the Maccabees. Then follow (chap. x.) exhortations to prayer, and assurances of the complete redemption and restoration of the covenant people. The Messiah is indicated as the true Shepherd of Israel, and contrasted with a foolish shepherd (chap. xi.), who forsakes the flock. Surely

* Chap. ix. 8.

† Compare Zech. ix. 9 with Matt. xxi. 4–11.

this chapter was in the mind of our Lord, when He contrasted Himself as the Good Shepherd with the hireling, who fleeth because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.*

2. The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel (chaps. xii.-xiv.) The old comprehensive word Israel is restored, making a better contrast than Judah with the land of Hadrach. This last oracle is one which deserves and requires most careful study.

After assurances of success and victory, we read of a future sorrow of the people of Jerusalem moved by the Divine Spirit, and of their poignant repentance as they look on Him—the Christ whom they have pierced. This began to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, when many were pricked in their hearts; but it awaits a greater accomplishment in the time when all Israel shall turn to the Lord. For those penitent mourners cleansing is provided, so that they are washed from sin; and a refining process prepares them to take their place as the people of God. It is also predicted, that the Good Shepherd would be smitten with the sword—the sign of justice and judgment—and not with the rod, the sign of fatherly chastisement. The sheep were then to be scattered; † but the Lord would keep His own, and refine them in the fire “as gold is refined.”

The last chapter perhaps no one quite understands, or can understand till it be fulfilled. It seems to stretch beyond our time to the favour which is to be shown to Jerusalem in the last days. The interest revolves entirely around that city. There is a wide combination against Jerusalem; it is attacked and ravaged; there is a time of trouble and sorrow. Then the Lord suddenly appears in terrible majesty, cleaving the very earth by His footstep; and the hostile nations flee before Him. “Then the Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day shall there be one Lord, and His name one.” ‡ Or, as Jesus said, “There shall be one flock, and one Shepherd.” § Thereafter living waters go out from Jerusalem. It becomes the

* John x. 12-14.

† Compare Zech. xiii. 7; Matt. xxvi. 31.

‡ Chap. xiv. 9.

§ John x. 16.

religious centre for all peoples and kindreds of the earth, and a holy city in every detail of life, having this for its motto, "Holiness to the Lord." In the old Jerusalem, these words were graven upon a plate of pure gold, worn by the high priest on his mitre, because he represented the holy calling of the entire nation of Israel. In the future Jerusalem, this title is to be everywhere and on all—inscribed on every character, every life, and every possession. In the old Jerusalem, the pure worship of Jehovah was sadly marred by imported heathenism, so that the Canaanite was brought into the House of the Lord of Hosts. Into the future Jerusalem nothing that defiles shall enter. The people shall be all righteous.

This great prophecy seems to us a first sketch of what we have in the end of the Book of Revelation.* Jerusalem is there assailed, and the nations that come against it are consumed with "fire from God out of heaven." Afterwards, it becomes the centre to which all the nations flow, bringing their riches and glory to its gates; and it is described as undefiled and holy to the Lord. Then, a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeds out of the throne of God and the Lamb. The correspondence is most exact, and the earlier revelation ought to be interpreted by the later.

Such is the Book of Zechariah. Apart from its specially Jewish aspect and interest, it has great value for us all:—

(1.) In its moral teaching, regarding the truth, justice, and mercy which God requires, and which are vastly more important than any number of solemn fasts.

(2.) In its frequent references to Christ. This book greatly fortifies the argument from prophecy for the authority of Holy Scripture, and the divine origin of Christianity; while it at the same time profits and edifies all of us who read it reverently, by keeping the Saviour before us in His personal history and His official relation to His people. Zechariah says with Isaiah, that Christ should be the Branch that would grow up from the root of Jesse. He says with David, that Christ would be both

* See Rev. xx. 7-9; xxi. 23; xxii. 1.

a Priest and a King. Then, he adds, that this King would not be such as the nations of the world obeyed. He would be just, and having salvation ; lowly, and riding upon an ass. He would be the Good Shepherd of Israel ; and yet the people would reject Him ; the sword of the Lord would smite Him ; and His own sheep, whom He called by name, would be scattered. The very price for which Judas Iscariot actually betrayed his Master is mentioned in this book ; and the use made of it is indicated. The money was given for the potter's field.

We read Zechariah to little purpose if we only exercise our ingenuity over his visions, and do not bend our spirits in adoration before that Holy One, whose coming he announced, —the Son of David, the Priest-King, the Shepherd-Saviour,—Jesus, who is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

MALACHI.

OF this last of the canonical prophets nothing is known. Some have taken Malachi to be an official designation, not the writer's proper personal name ; but there is no sound reason for disturbing the natural interpretation of the opening verse. We may fix the time during which he flourished as in the days Nehemiah ; for he reproves those sins in Jerusalem against which that faithful leader contended, and describes the condition of the people exactly as it appears in his history. Thus, of the three prophets of the restoration period, Haggai and Zechariah were contemporary with Joshua and Zerubbabel ; but Malachi came later, and was associated with Nehemiah. He was to that vigorous reformer such a coadjutor as Isaiah had been to Hezekiah, or Jeremiah to Josiah in an earlier age. Accordingly, there is no question in his book of building the Temple. It was built and dedicated ; and the prophet addressed himself rather to the moral and spiritual reformation of the priests and the people.

Now the evils reproved by the prophets of this period were not the same with those against which the prophets before the captivity declaimed. No longer was it necessary to condemn debasing heathen superstitions, for the proneness to these was corrected by the stern discipline of the captivity : but now there appeared that confidence in the righteousness of dead works from which issued the Pharisaism of the future, and that murmuring unbelieving spirit from which Sadduceeism sprung. Against these evils Malachi reasoned and expostulated in trenchant and forcible terms, aiming mainly at the correction

of the faults prevalent in his own time, but also foretelling things to come,—the advent of the Lord to His Temple, and the searching of hearts at His appearing.

The opening passage, fundamental to all that follows, consists of five verses (chap. i. 1–5). It is important to observe, that “the burden of the word of the Lord” is “to Israel,” as it also is in the last oracle of Zechariah.* The people restored from captivity are recognised as representing all the tribes; and while the tribal name Judah still occurs, the national name Israel also reappears; and it is the God of Israel who speaks by His prophet to all the sons of Jacob.

In the opening address, the people are reminded of Jehovah’s love to them; and their condition, as sons of Jacob, is contrasted with that of the descendants of Esau. It was of God’s good pleasure that Jacob was preferred to Esau, and destined to the covenant blessing before the twin brothers were born. After many centuries, the descendants of both fell under the power of the Chaldeans, and their territories were laid waste. But while Idumea lay desolate—an inheritance for jackals of the desert—the land and cities of Israel began to recover population and prosperity. Because of this, the Lord asserted a special claim on Israel for devout and grateful service.

Reproof of the sins of the priests (chap. i. 6–ii. 9).—They had no earnestness, but were content with a cold perfunctory service at the sanctuary. They offered polluted bread and cheap sacrifices, having no deep reverence for Jehovah as the Father and the Master of Israel. In this they were all the more blameworthy, because they were the appointed ministers—the priests of the Lord who is “a great King,” and to whom the incense and offerings of a universal homage are due. Not such were the early priests. The Lord speaks thus of His covenant with Levi, when the sacred order was first established in that tribe,—“My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him that he might fear, and he feared Me, and stood in awe of My name. The law of truth was in his mouth,

* Zech. xii. 1.

and unrighteousness was not found in his lips: he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and did turn many away from iniquity; for the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts."* The charge against the priests of Malachi's time was that they had corrupted the covenant of Levi, or departed from the purity and equity originally prescribed to their order; and the Lord therefore "made them contemptible and base before all the people."

The reproof is administered in the most vigorous terms, because it was more important than ever to Israel to possess a faithful priesthood. Now that the kingdom of David was in abeyance and the voices of prophets were not to be heard for generations, the priests had an increased responsibility, as the religious and moral leaders of the people.

II. Condemnation of marriage with the heathen (chap. ii. 10-16).—From the priests, the prophet turns to the people, and condemns marriage with alien women, as the fruitful source, in the past history of their nation, of departure from the worship of the one living God. He also denounces, as connected with this evil, the divorce of Israelite wives for frivolous causes. He declares, that the Lord will not allow violations of the marriage covenant to pass with impunity, but will punish the man who, because a new fancy strikes him, puts away the wife of youth. The Lord "hates putting away," and does not permit divorce, save only for adultery, which is in itself a virtual dissolution of the marriage covenant. Now, this misconduct was especially reprehensible in men of Israel, because of the holy calling of that nation. The fifteenth verse of the second chapter, which has perplexed many readers, puts the case thus,—“And did He not make one?” (Did not God make Israel one family, and then one nation, separate from others? yet, this was not from any exhaustion of Divine resources.)—“The remainder of the Spirit was with Him.”

* Chap. ii. 5-7.

(He might, if He had so pleased, have called other nations.) "And wherefore one?" (Why did He, then, isolate this people to Himself?) "That He might seek a godly seed." Therefore, to put away Israelite wives, and marry daughters of the heathen, would be to contradict the whole purpose of God, and to defile what He desired to be a holy nation and peculiar people.

The New Testament contains the same law of divorce as the Old, and requires it to be strictly guarded against caprice and self-will. But it has a more lenient doctrine in regard to the children of a Christian married to a heathen. Israel was exclusive; the Church is comprehensive; and, therefore, although it was rash and improper for one of the early Christians to marry a heathen woman, or for a Christian woman to take a heathen husband, such unions were not to be violently broken, as they were in Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah. The children of such unions were accounted not profane, but holy, and were claimed as members of the Church. Nay, this rule held good when, of two persons who married as heathens, one became a Christian, and the other remained an idolater. The Church was open to their children.

III. The day of the Lord (chap. ii. 17-iv.)

The sceptical spirit, which afterwards characterised the Sadducees, was already at work among the people. They wearied the Lord with their bitter words, charging Him with indifference as the Judge of Israel. "Ye say, Every evil-doer is good in the eyes of Jehovah, and He delighteth in them; or, where is the God of judgment?"

In disapproval and reproof of such charges, a tone of judicial severity is given to the prediction of the Divine advent which follows. It is not "God your Saviour will come," but "the Lord will come"—the God of judgment of whom you speak as though He were not, or as if you had nothing to fear in His presence. In the language employed, there is something like a blending together of the first and second advents of Christ.

His first was for salvation, and His second will be for judgment; but His first was also for judgment of this world, and His second will be to the saints that look for Him, a coming without sin unto salvation.

The messenger who should prepare the way of the Lord was the Elijah of chap. iv. 5—the Baptist of the Gospel story, to whom, indeed, the parallel passage in Isaiah (chap. xl. 3) is expressly applied by an Evangelist. As the preacher of repentance, John epitomised all the prophetic teachings and warnings that went before, marked the close of the period which belonged to Moses and the prophets, and made way for Him who should come after him and be preferred before him.

Then, says the prophecy before us, “the Lord shall come suddenly to His Temple.” His day is announced as a day of searching and purifying; * and so it actually was, as we learn from the Gospel narrative. The Child brought into the Temple was “for the fall and rising up of many in Israel, and for a sign to be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed.” † The presence and the ministry of Jesus on earth brought to light the true dispositions of men around Him, exposed the hypocrites, and roused the slumbering enmity of the selfish and the proud. They had no cloak for their sin. He sat as a Refiner, separating by His holy Word the silver from the dross—silver in which His own image might be reflected, while the dross perished in the judgment.

It had been alleged that Jehovah took pleasure in evil-doers. On the contrary, He now declared by His prophet that He had withheld the blessing from the Jews of that day, just because they did evil in His sight. ‡ They defrauded Him of the tithes and offerings due for the Temple service, robbing God—as so many professing Christians rob Him still, giving nothing, or nothing like what they ought, for His service, and shabbily worshipping at the expense of other people. In vain they pray

* Chap. iii. 2-4.

† Luke ii. 34, 35.

‡ Chap. iii. 7-15.

God to send them showers of blessing. He requires them to prove Him, not with words of prayer in lieu of offerings, but with the offerings which they owe to Him, and which they cannot withhold without dishonesty.

Contrasted with the scoffing and insincere, were the devout and humble men who feared Jehovah, and who "spake one with another," to encourage their faith and patience. These were not overlooked, far less confounded with the evil-doers. They were registered in a book of remembrance before the Lord, and will be to Him for a treasured possession in the day when the distinction shall be made manifest between the righteous and the wicked—those who served Jehovah, and those who served Him not.

In the last chapter, language still more vivid is used regarding the day of the Lord. It has had a fulfilment at His first advent, for John the Baptist quoted from this chapter concerning the sifting of the floor, the gathering of the wheat into the barn, and the burning of the chaff with unquenchable fire; but the most ample and conspicuous fulfilment remains for His second coming. The "Sun of Righteousness" arose when Christ came who is the Light of Life. That Sun will shine forth again in great glory, and the unrighteous shall not be able to stand before the Righteous One.

Then, just as the Old Testament is being closed, Moses and Elijah are recalled, the two witnesses who afterwards appeared on the Holy Mount. The next to the last verse bids the Jews remember Moses and his law; the last verse tells them to look for Elijah the prophet. Prophecy was now to cease till the forerunner of Messiah should appear. The law and the prophets were to be until John; and he would be the "Elijah who was to come." The Elijah spirit was to breathe again in that brave preacher in the desert, who should stand against the strong current of national unrighteousness, and turn back the hearts of a degenerate people to their pious ancestry. And yet, as Elijah succeeded only with a portion of the nation in his time, and could not avert the great catastrophe of Israel, so John the

Baptist was to prevail with only a portion of the Israel of his time, in whose hearts the way of the Lord was prepared, and judgment must fall on the impenitent and the proud.

Elijah-ministry will reappear before the great and terrible day of the Lord. There will be a disturbance of vain security, a solemn call to repentance, which some will obey, and some refuse; and then the Lord shall come to judge the world in righteousness.

So ends the Book of Malachi. So ends the Old Testament with the stern words, "Lest I come and smite the land with a curse." The New Testament has a sweeter close: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints."

This book is often quoted in the New Testament, and has several memorable sayings in great favour with Christians. Such are—

1. The promise of universal homage to the Lord, couched in the language of the Old Testament worship, but to be rendered by us in the simplicity which befits the times of the New Testament. "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering: for My name shall be great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of hosts."* Some plead this mention of incense as sanctioning its use in Christian worship; and the "pure offering" has been interpreted as "the holy sacrifice of the mass." But rites in the Old Testament are not to be satisfied by rites in the New. They signify spiritual sacrifices. The incense of our dispensation is prayer; and the "pure offering" willing obedience.

2. The promise of Christ as a Refiner. "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." Such is the effect of His word

* Chap. i. 11.

and providence, under the operation of the Spirit now present in the Church. Refining of silver is a slow and delicate process ; but Christ has patience and skill enough, gradually to refine the hearts and characters of them that are His, and, cost what it may to flesh and blood, He will deal with them, and watch over them, till they reflect His image and likeness.

3. The promise of a book of remembrance for those who fear the Lord, and think on His name. There be many who fear not the Lord, and refuse to have Him in their thoughts. They join hand in hand in evil fellowship. Their words are stout ; they cry Aha ! aha ! The Lord hears them, and will yet cover them with everlasting confusion. But the Lord hearkens, or bends an attentive ear, to hear the voices of all who gather together unto His name ; and His eyes are upon the faithful of the land that they may dwell with Him. Devout fellowship here, a meeting of the saints, their hearts burning within them, is more noticed in heaven than all the splendour of courts, and all the debates of parliaments. Little matter what the world thinks or says of those who thus help one another's faith and constancy : the Lord designs them for His treasure, and their names are written in heaven. O precious words of promise ! "They shall be mine !" A treasure to Christ ! and so to the Father also ; for our Saviour said, "All Mine are Thine." There is a sweet interchange of possession between Jesus Christ and His loving followers who "think on His name." He is theirs, and they are His. He is their portion, and beauty, and chief joy. They are as seals on His heart and arm, and as precious jewels in His crown.

4. The promise of the Sun of Righteousness, with healing under His wings. As the beams of the sun give health, colour, and growth to living plants and animals ; so Jesus Christ gives health to the sick at heart, joy to the depressed, and growth to

those who would follow after righteousness. It is a good hymn
“for the Christian’s Sabbath day.”

“Thou, glorious Sun of Righteousness,
On this day risen to set no more,
Shine on me now to heal, to bless,
With brighter beams than e’er before.
Shine on, shine on, eternal Sun !
Pour richer floods of life and light,
Till that bright Sabbath be begun,
That glorious day which knows no night.”

TRANSITION FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT TO THE NEW.

AFTER Ezra the scribe and Malachi the prophet, a long silence of God fell upon Judah. He who had spoken to the fathers in the prophets made a solemn pause of about four centuries, and then spoke again in His Son.

The interval, however, was by no means a dull or insignificant period in the history of the Jewish nation. It was a time of widening thought, and of great political vicissitude. Widening thought; for the Jews became familiar with other countries and other modes of mind, and learned the language and culture of the Greeks. Political vicissitude; for they were under the Persian emperors—then under the Greek—then under the tyranny of the Syrian kings—then independent, under the Maccabees—and, when Christ came, subject to the Idumean Herod, the protégé of Rome.

It was also a time of considerable mental activity. Although no addition was made to the Sacred Books, the Canon of which was reckoned complete, the study of letters was encouraged, and sacred learning was prized. In the third century B.C. the Septuagint version of the Old Testament was begun at Alexandria, and in course of the next century was completed. This contributed greatly to the diffusion of a knowledge of Holy Scripture wherever the Greek language was used. In Judea, and in the Jewish colonies, a considerable religious literature was produced, specimens of which are extant in the books called the Apocrypha. Synagogues rose in importance, and the Law was read with paraphrastic comments which were written

down in the Targums. To prophets succeeded commentators, doctors, scribes, and lawyers. It was a time of reflection and analysis. Then, as usual at such periods, sects and parties formed themselves within the House of Israel. Some revolted against the pedantry of the prevailing school of interpretation and prescription, and struck out in the direction of scepticism : these were the Sadducees. A greater number pleaded for minute strictness ; but, while professing to magnify the Law, really overshadowed and enfeebled it with their traditions : these were the Pharisees.

Such is our own time. The Canon of the New Testament is complete. No visions come ; no voices speak from heaven. Now it is that critics, commentators, and disputants abound. The Church widens her knowledge, and learns by passing through vicissitudes. But parties form ; schools of religious thought compete for disciples ; sects watch and resist each other,—and there is no lack of the leaven of the Sadducees and Pharisees. So it was, till Christ came. So it is, till Christ come again.

But, to return. The New Testament begins on the same ground on which we have finished the Old, the same Judea, yet not the same ; politically and intellectually it is greatly changed. We are among new ideas, the out-growth, or in part the importations, of the four hundred years of interval.

When the new time, or fulness of time arrived, the first thing was not the writing of the New Testament. We read therein of Christ and the Church ; but Christ came and went, and the Church was formed and grown to some strength before a word of the New Testament was written. The Scriptures honoured by Christ and the early Church were the books of the Old Testament ; and the Word of the Lord which won such victories at Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, and Thessalonica, was not the written Gospel as we have it, but the oral Gospel, the spoken testimony to Jesus, with an argument specially addressed to the Jews regarding His fulfilment of the law and the prophets. But, after this oral testimony had spread abroad, it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, who now dwelt in the Church as the glorifier

of Jesus, to inspire a few men—eight or nine—to write down in books what should be profitable to all future generations of the Christian Church. These books, twenty-seven in number, form what we call “the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” They were not written, like those of the Old Testament, over a space of many hundred years, but were all produced within one generation. They may therefore be more freely compared with a view to their correct exegesis.

It is very important to have just conceptions of the New Testament in its relation to the Old.

I. *It is a continuation of the Old.* To read the New Testament apart from the Old is to sever it from its base of support, and so to hinder or obscure its interpretation. Here are not two separate trees of life, but one and the same. It has the Pentateuch for its deep roots, and then a grand old trunk of history, from which go out strong boughs of Hebrew poem and prophecy. It had a time of rest, during which it added nothing to its growth; but then it began again to spring upwards in a solid stem of the history of Christ and the early Church, and to throw out new branches of apostolic teaching, till the loftiest point was reached in the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ—and so the Scripture was complete.

Let no one suppose that it is an accidental or a mechanical conjunction which brings the Old and New Testaments together. There is a living oneness, a binding unity of origin, doctrine, and purpose. They have the same informing spirit, and constitute one organic whole. The Old underlies the New at every part. The New rests on the Old, and is developed out of it, though also adding much to it. It is not enough to trace references, or to find resemblances between detached passages. The whole of the Old Testament prepares for and sustains the whole of the New. The same living God communicates with us in both, and reveals Himself—His character and will, holiness and love, grace and glory. Through Holy Writ, from Genesis to Revelation, run the same great thoughts—God a just God and a

Saviour—man a sinner, man a saint—angels of God, the devil and his angels—sin, death, righteousness, life—the peace and strength of faith—the sovereignty of grace—sacrifice, priesthood, redemption by blood, prayer, love, hope, obedience, holiness—judgment to come. In treating of these, the New Testament is not a beginning of revelation, but strictly a continuation, while not a repetition, of the Old.

II. *It has a structural resemblance to the Old.* Differing as they do in bulk, the Old and New Testaments have a certain similarity of order, all the more striking that it must have been unintentional on the part of man, and indicates the moulding wisdom of the Holy Ghost.

Look at the arrangement of each. First come histories; then reasonings and teachings; last of all, prophecies and visions. From all the sacred books of the East, the Bible is distinguished by the large proportion of narrative in each of its grand divisions, so that all its reflections, arguments, and admonitions rest on a basis of veritable facts. This marks the wisdom of God, who knows the mind of man, and its cravings for a solid foundation to its thought; and this also proves the fearless truth of the sacred writers, who multiplied historic statements of the most minute kind, and references which would at once expose fictitious writing to detection.

Then, more minutely.—The Old Testament opens with the genesis of man and of all things that concern him; the New, with the book of the generation of Jesus Christ. The books of Moses have their parallel in the books of Jesus by the evangelists; the last of the former (Deuteronomy), full of the words of Jehovah, having its evident correspondent in the last of the latter (St. John), full of discourses and sayings of the Lord Jesus. Joshua's history, and the subsequent historical books, full of exploits and vicissitudes, are paralleled in the Acts of the Apostles. Then, for the poetical books and the didactic parts of the prophetic, we have the Epistles of the Servants of Christ. And, as the Old Testament ends with predictions

and visions, so does the New with the words of the prophecy of the last book, so full of heavenly visions—"the Revelation of Jesus Christ which He gave to His servant John."

Nor is this all. Besides the similarity of arrangement, we find something quite unique in the way of Divine expression throughout all the Scriptures; the same voice of majesty—the same method of teaching by history and biography rather than by argumentation—the same calmness and unflinching fidelity of narrative—the same sounding forth of mercy and of judgment—and the same fearless reproof of all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men.

The more we reflect on these things—the similarity that runs through a book so various as the Bible, and the general correspondence in the structure of its parts—the more we perceive the absurdity of regarding it as a mere fortuitous assemblage of old Hebrew and Greek works. As well persuade us that the polished stones in the Temple at Jerusalem tumbled fortuitously into their places, or that the stars have their positions and move in their courses by some happy accident.

III. *It is an advance upon the Old.*

1. As respects the messengers of God. To the fathers God spoke in the prophets, by many stages, in portions as He saw fit, and in diverse ways,—communicating through visions and dreams, by signs and prodigies, by angelic messages, or by laying His word as a burden on the spirit of the prophet which he burned to deliver. Oral revelation preceded Scripture. The prophets *spoke* as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Thereafter, so much of the oral communication as God thought fit to make permanent, was embodied in writing by Moses and the prophets; and, as the speaking was directed by the Holy Spirit, so also was the writing. It was Theopneustic Scripture.

In these last days God has spoken in His Son, far above all prophets and all angels, the Heir of all things. Not all that He spoke,* but so much of His communication as God has seen meet to preserve for the benefit of the Church is conveyed to us in

* See John xx. 30, 31; xxi. 25.

the New Testament, which is also Theopneustic Scripture.* Thus we have on record sayings, parables, replies, and discourses of Christ, containing those deep things of God which underlie all Christian doctrine and hope. But avowedly these were incomplete, and needed further explanation, combination, and development. So the Son of God continued to speak after His ascension in His witnesses and preachers, on whom descended His Holy Spirit; and then, so much of their teaching as was to edify the Church in all time coming was also enshrined, under the guidance of the same Spirit, in the writings of the New Testament. Now, it may be, that Luke is no greater than Samuel, or Simon Peter than David, or Paul than Isaiah, or John than Ezekiel or Daniel; but their writings have a certain advance in dignity, from the fact that they followed the manifestation of the Son of God, and were composed to publish the preciousness and develop the teachings of Him who spake as never man spake.

2. In the light and fulness of the revelation itself.† The New Testament is much less than the Old, but the smaller proportion of letter contains the greater proportion of spirit. There is no longer an array of laws and statutes, or a handwriting of ordinances. Shadows have given place to substance; elements and rudiments to perfection; minute regulations to profound principles; patterns of heavenly things to heavenly things themselves. In the old time, there was dimness as of light coming through a veil; in the new time, we have unveiled faces, and God's own marvellous light.

The contrast between the dispensations is uniformly to the advantage of the later. Accordingly the New Scriptures share the distinction of the dispensation to which they belong; having to set forth a better covenant, better sacrifice, better promises, a better hope, better priesthood, and a better sanctuary. The heavens seem to open more fully and brightly over us; and, because Jesus is there, we can look steadfastly up into heaven.

* See 2 Pet. iii. 16.

† See 2 Cor. iii.

Herein is implied no disparagement of the Old Testament, but simply the recognition of the fact that the Bible is a progressive Book, and that the second division, containing more advanced and developed truth, is to rule our interpretation and use of the first division; not the first to determine the meaning of the second. There has been a bettering as well as a lengthening of revelation regarding theology, ethics, and worship. God is the same God in both Testaments; but in the New, God is more known—duty more exalted—holiness in principles and motives based on fellowship with God in light—love is shown to be the sphere in which the God of light and the children of light abide—and worship is through free access to the Father, by one Spirit, through Christ Jesus. “And so”—to use the words of one of the Bampton lecturers—“the great course of divine teaching has reached its highest stage. After slowly moving on through the simple thoughts of patriarchal piety, through the system and covenant of the law, and through the higher spirituality of the prophets, it rose suddenly to a lofty elevation, when God spoke to us in His Son; and even higher yet, when the Son ascended into glory, and sent down the Holy Ghost to take up His unfinished word and to open mysteries. Each stage of progress based itself on the facts and instructions of that which went before. The law was given to the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the prophet spoke to those under the law; Jesus Christ came to those who had been taught by the prophets; the Holy Ghost instructed those who had received Christ.”*

Thank God! we have a complete Bible, the Scriptures of truth: yet we need more—we want the Spirit of the truth. Teach us, Lord Jesus! with the illumination of the Holy Ghost, causing Thy Word to enter into, quicken, and guide us; so that we, obeying Thee as a Prophet, may be purged from all sin by Thee as our High Priest, and, at Thy coming and Thy kingdom, may reign with Thee in glory everlasting! Amen!

* Canon Bernard's Lectures on the Progress of Doctrine.

ST. MATTHEW.

THE four histories of Jesus Christ were not the first written of the Books of the New Covenant, but are placed first in order because they furnish the basis of facts for all that follow. They are four independent accounts of one inimitable life. They have a perfect harmony; but it is best seen, not in the sort of mosaic that has been formed by piecing and fitting together extracts from those books, but in the intelligent survey of each narrative from its proper point of sight. They may be compared to four portraits of the same countenance, or four views of the same building taken from different stand-points. By the combination of the four, we have an advantage that no one account could possibly yield, for a full conception of the character and career of Jesus.

Many other comparisons have been found for these books. Augustine described them as four great trumpets sounded to gather the Church from the east, west, north, and south, into a holy unity of faith. Calvin, following Chrysostom, saw Christ riding forth in a triumphal chariot, drawn by four steeds.* Bengel's figure was that of the four parts in music, which may

* "Evangelicam historiam a quatuor testibus divinitus ordinatis proditam quadrigis non abs re comparo, quia ex apta concinnaque hac harmonia videtur consulto Deus quasi triumphalem currum Filio suo parasse, unde toti fidelium populo conspicuus appareat, et cujus celeritate terrarum orbem perlustret. Nec vero inscite Augustinus tubis similes facit quatuor Evangelistas, quarum clangor omnes mundi plagas impleat, ut ab Oriente, Occasu, Meridie, Septentrione in sacrum fidei consensum accita Ecclesia confluat."—*Calvini in Novum Testamentum Commentarii. Epistola Dedicatoria.*

sometimes be sung apart, but blend together to form a perfect harmony. More ancient than any of these comparisons—for it comes from Irenæus—is that which likened the four evangelists to the composite cherubic symbol—the man, the lion, the ox, and the flying eagle. Better than this, and also very ancient—for it comes from Jerome—is another, which likens these books to the four streams into which the river of Eden was parted as it flowed out into the world.

The Gospel was and is, properly, the oral message of salvation in Christ delivered to mankind. The urgent question among His servants was, how to have the Gospel preached to every creature—“How shall they believe without a preacher?” But, from the very success of their preaching, necessity arose for written records to preserve the Gospel from those variations and corruptions which always weaken the value of unwritten tradition. To meet this want four books were produced, not by any appointment of the Church, but by the independent action of four writers under the Divine guidance—two of whom were apostles, and two the companions of apostles. Other narratives also appeared, but the four which we reckon canonical are the only ones which, from their first publication, were revered in the Church; and they are largely recognised and quoted in the Christian literature of the second and third centuries. Though commonly called the four gospels, they are properly the one Gospel in four forms—the Gospel of Jesus Christ *according to* Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Of Matthew, also called Levi, we know this much: that he was originally a toll collector, was called by Christ to be a disciple, and was placed among the twelve apostles. He describes himself “as a man named Matthew, sitting at the place of toll,” near the Galilean Sea or Lake. He tells that, at the call of Jesus, he arose and followed Him; and also that Jesus sat at meat in his house in the company of many publicans and sinners; but he leaves it to Luke to tell, that he had “made a great feast in his own house.” In the list of the apostles, he enters his name as “Matthew the publican,” and

he has not written a word to exalt himself, or to take away the reproach of the class to which he had belonged. He does not record the story of Zaccheus, chief of the publicans at Jericho, or the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in the Temple. On the other hand, it is he, and no other, who gives us that saying of the Lord, in which the publicans are joined with "the harlots," as believing John the Baptist, and going into the kingdom of God.

Matthew remained in Jerusalem, or, at all events, in Palestine, for many years after the ascension of Christ. In Palestine, he wrote this book for the use of the Jewish Christians. He is said to have written first in Hebrew, and afterwards to have produced this Gospel, as we have it, in Greek. In this, there is nothing to surprise or perplex; for many authors have written in two languages to secure for their works a greater circulation and influence. Josephus wrote his *History of the Wars of the Jews* in Hebrew, and then in Greek. Calvin wrote in Latin and in French. Bacon and Milton wrote in Latin and in English. But scholars are able to show that the Greek Gospel of Matthew in our canon of the New Testament is an original work and no mere translation.*

The circumstance that this narrative was originally prepared for Hebrew Christians accounts for many of its characteristics. It gives prominence to the Messianic royalty, and very frequently points out the fulfilment of ancient prophecy. It always keeps before the reader's mind the statement contained in its opening sentence, that Jesus Christ was "the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." Matthew traces the genealogy from Abraham, not, as Luke does, from Adam; and the genealogy itself is the legal, not, as in Luke, the lineal.† He tells of the birth of the

* See this point well discussed in Dr. George Salmon's *Historical Introduction*, Lect. X.

† "Both genealogies, without doubt, give the descent of Joseph—the universal belief till the sixteenth century,—St. Matthew His *legal* descent showing that our Lord was Solomon's *heir* (2 Sam. vii. 13-17; 1 Chron. xvii. 14), though the line of Solomon failed in Jehoiachim (Jer. xxii. 29, 30); and St. Luke His *natural* descent, showing that He was *lineally*

“King of the Jews;” and describes the people, in amazement at some of our Lord’s miracles, exclaiming—“Is not this the Son of David?” He gives the parables always as concerning “the kingdom of heaven”—a phrase peculiar to this book, and indicating the elevation of the old theocracy into a kingdom of heavenly privilege and promise by Jesus Christ. Latin words he uses rarely; and does not think it necessary to explain Jewish phrases and usages.

This Gospel has much in common with the Epistle of St. James, which was written about the same time, and addressed to Israel as “the twelve tribes scattered abroad.” The admonitions of that epistle regarding the perfect law, the higher righteousness, the doing of the word, the taming of the tongue, the virtue of gentleness, the reward of patience, and the royal rule of love and equity, all have their foundations in those sayings of Christ which are recorded by St. Matthew.

“Other characteristics of the book before us are due to the personal habits of the evangelist. It has a methodical arrangement; such as we should expect from one who, as a collector of taxes, had been a man of business, trained to system and exactness. Matthew does not run on in the order of time, as a mere annalist; but groups discourses, parables, miracles, and prophecies by themselves, in a topical order, and with a certain power of combination that produces an admirable effect.”* Another feature of the work which we trace to his individuality is this—he pays special attention to what was said by his Divine Master in regard to the civil authority, and the duty of paying taxes or tribute. Naturally so, since he had been an official of the civil service, and had collected the dues in Galilee. When our Lord was interrogated concerning the lawfulness of giving tribute to Cæsar, both Mark and Luke say that He called for “a penny,” but Matthew has it—“Shew me the tribute

descended from David (2 Sam. vii. 12; Ps. lxxxix. 35, 36), through Nathan. —*Westcott’s Introduction to the Study of the Gospels*, 4th Edition, p. 312, note.

* See Rev. Edward A. Thomson on the “Four Evangelists,” p. 24.

money ;" so that it was not with any coin at haphazard, but with the coin ready for payment as tribute before Him, that He gave His memorable answer, "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's." * At an earlier period, a question had been raised at Capernaum regarding the payment of the Church rate, or tax for the Temple. Matthew is the only evangelist who describes the incident. The collectors, who acted, not under the civil government, but under the Sanhedrim, inquired of Simon Peter whether his Master would pay such tribute. The Lord explained to His disciple, that, the Temple being His Father's House, He was not under this obligation ; nevertheless, lest a refusal should be misconstrued, He provided, in the mouth of a fish from the lake, the exact sum required for Himself and Simon Peter. Matthew took careful notice of such matters. They interested the mind of the quondam publican.

When we come to analyse this gospel, and aim at some convenient classification of its contents, we are struck, though not satisfied, with the ingenious suggestion of a great German expositor, † who sees in the order of this gospel to the Hebrews a resemblance to the Pentateuch. Thus he arranges it in five parts. The first chapter of Matthew is "the book of the generation of Jesus Christ," and corresponds to Genesis. The second chapter begins with the slaughter of infants at Bethlehem, and the escape of Jesus, as Exodus began with the slaughter of infants in Egypt and the escape of Moses. The Sermon on the Mount in Galilee is of course the counterpart to the law given from Mount Sinai. The eighth chapter opens with the cleansing of a leper. We have then reached what answers to the Book of Leviticus. When we come to the tenth chapter, we read of the organisation provided for the Church under the twelve apostles, corresponding to the narrative in Numbers of the ordering of the twelve tribes of Israel under their princes. At the nineteenth chapter of the Gospel, where the ministry in Judea begins—a ministry of reproof, exhortation, and prophecy

* Chap. xxii. 17-22.

† Delitzsch.

—we enter on the parallel to the Book of Deuteronomy. The whole ends with the death and implied (not affirmed) ascension of Jesus, and with directions for the future guidance of the Church, just as the Pentateuch ends with the death and implied ascension of Moses, and with directions for the future guidance of Israel.

The general features of the analogy thus touched upon are extremely interesting, but it is a thing to be deftly touched, not closely handled. We shall really make more of a less ingenious but more commonplace arrangement. Thus—

I. The introduction, chaps. i., ii.—This is occupied with the pedigree of “the King of the Jews”—His nativity—the homage paid to Him by the Magi—and the persecution directed against His life by “Herod the king.” It is shown that in all these things the words of ancient prophets were fulfilled. Five quotations are given in the introduction—from Isaiah, Micah, Hosea, Jeremiah, and the fifth (chap. ii. 23), not with verbal accuracy from any of the prophetic books as we have them, but most probably a free rendering of a passage in Isaiah. Doubtless, in these and similar interpretations, so abundant in this book, we have specimens of the exposition of Moses and the prophets which our Lord gave to the disciples after He was risen from the dead;* which Matthew, of course, heard, and hearing, could never forget.

II. The prelude to the ministry of Christ, chaps. iii.–iv. 11.—The long silent voice of prophecy was heard again, for a prophet like Elijah, yet more than a prophet, the promised forerunner of the Messiah, appeared. It is no part of this evangelist’s plan to give any account of the origin and birth of this prophet. “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” † But the evangelist is careful to show,

* See St. Luke xxiv. 27, 44, 45.

† See St. Luke iii. 1, 2.

according to his manner, that the appearance of this preacher of repentance fulfilled an ancient oracle in Isaiah.

Then Jesus is seen baptized at the river Jordan, anointed with the Holy Ghost, and receiving testimony from heaven to His Divine sonship. There followed immediately the ordeal of temptation. In the wilderness, the scene of John's preaching, Jesus was tried and proved. And when His unrecorded temptations were overcome, and the threefold recorded temptation was repelled, the Man Christ Jesus was ready for His ministry. The Holy Spirit had rested on Him as a dove, and the evil spirit was defeated by His steadfastness in faith. Then began—

III. His ministry, as a Prophet mighty in word and deed (chap. iv. 12-xx. 34).*

1. In Galilee (chap. iv. 12-xviii. 35). We have said that Matthew is not addicted to chronological order in his narrative. He omits the first year of our Lord's ministry, which was spent partly in Galilee, and partly in Judea; including a visit to Jerusalem. In this time fall the incidents described in the earlier chapters of the Gospel according to St. John. Matthew, desirous to set forth the great prophet before the eyes of his countrymen, starts from the time when "John was cast into prison." That faithful witness being silenced, the Prophet greater still lifted up His voice in Galilee. He resided for a time at Capernaum, on the Lake shore—thus again fulfilling, as Matthew is careful to notice, "that which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet." But Jesus was by no means a mere preacher to Capernaum. "He went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of

* As Godet points out in his *Studies of the New Testament*, five grand discourses of Jesus are embedded in the narrative :—

1. Sermon on the Mount. Chaps. 5-7.
2. Charge to the Apostles. Chap. 10.
3. Seven Parables of the Kingdom. Chap. 13.
4. Instruction on Church Discipline. Chap. 18.
5. Prophecies of Judgment. Chaps. 23-25.

sickness, and all manner of disease among the people ; and His fame went throughout all Syria."

The gracious ministry in Galilee is related after this manner :—

(1.) The Prophet, fulfilling the old law and prophets, reveals the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven, declares its blessedness, points out its searching, spiritual character, and gives direction to those who would be its subjects concerning almsgiving, fasting, prayer, and obedience.

(2.) The Prophet, thus mighty in word, shows Himself mighty in deeds, and is approved by great signs and wonders. So, after the Sermon on the Mount, we have two chapters recording a close succession of miracles. These acts of healing suggest a reference to the words of Isaiah—"Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." The series of miracles is closed with a repetition of the general statement. "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness, and every disease among the people."*

(3.) The Prophet, moved with compassion on the multitude, and surveying the wretched condition of the sheep of the house of Israel, sends out disciples to propagate more widely the blessings of His ministry. The twelve whom He chose were plain men, unconnected with the priesthood, uninfluenced by the rich, unsophisticated by the schools, standing quite clear of the competing sects of the period ; yet men of character, of intelligence, and of varied ages and dispositions, so as to secure the width of mind and heart necessary for the institution of the Church, which was to reverence them as its patriarchs and apostles.

(4.) Then the Prophet resumes His personal ministry, which begins to conflict more and more sharply with the predominant school of religious opinion, as represented by the scribes and Pharisees. Parables now appear, being used to teach the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. They disclosed truth to

* Chap. ix. 35.

the disciples, and at the same time veiled it from those who were hostile—thereby again fulfilling a “prophecy of Isaiah.” At this time, too, other mighty acts are done ; and the disciples begin to speak of their Master as the Son of God.* On the mount of transfiguration, there is a vision of the King in His beauty, with a renewal of the testimony from Heaven to His Divine Sonship.

The result of this ministry in Galilee may be thus summed up : Jesus, by teaching and wonder-working, established His claims as Lawgiver and Prophet ; developed His great doctrine of the kingdom of heaven ; provided for the continuance and spread of His teaching through the apostles ; and condemned the formalism and hypocrisy of the prominent religious leaders of the time—the Pharisees, lawyers, and scribes.

Then follows His ministry—

2. In Judea and Jerusalem, occupying about three months.

Attended by great multitudes, Jesus leaves Galilee, and comes “into the borders of Judea beyond Jordan.” On the way, He encounters the opposition of the Pharisees ; but He moves on, foreseeing His decease at Jerusalem, and sublimely willing to die. As He approaches the city, He speaks more than ever of the kingdom, and answers all manner of questions, telling of the relation of little children to the kingdom—of the difficulty of the entrance of rich men—of rewards in the kingdom—and of the right hand and left of the King. Two blind men at Jericho, hearing the tread of a great multitude escorting some one to Jerusalem, connect it in their thoughts with the restoration of David’s throne, and cry, “Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.”

That which St. Matthew most fully relates of our Lord at Jerusalem must be marked as a separate division. It is—

IV. The passion (chaps. xxi.—xxvii. 66). A week was occupied thus :—

Sunday.—The triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

* Chap. xiv. 33 ; xvi. 16.

Monday.—Spent in the Temple. The fig-tree withered for showing leaves and having no fruit—a sign of Israel's condition. Under the leaves of profession in the Temple, the Lord had looked anxiously for fruit of righteousness, and found none.

Tuesday.—Again spent in the Temple, in a severe discussion with Herodians, Pharisees, and Sadducees. The Lord completely answered and silenced them all; and, with words of terrible warning and sorrowful farewell, He left the Temple, never to re-enter it. Thereafter, seated apart on the Mount of Olives, He prophesied to His disciples of things to come, and, by a succession of solemn parables, enforced the duties of watchfulness and diligence in view of His second advent.

Wednesday.—Spent in Bethany; so far, at least, as Matthew indicates. A pause before the deepest sorrow.

Thursday.—The first day of the feast of unleavened bread. Preparation and observance of the Passover. Institution of the Lord's Supper. Agony in the garden. Betrayal and capture of the Saviour, who was led away in the night to the high priest's palace.

Friday (18th March, A.D. 29).—The arraignment first before the high priest and the Jewish council, and then before Pilate the Roman governor. The condemnation to death—crucifixion—mockery—death—attendant prodigies—and burial.

Saturday.—In the tomb, which was guarded by soldiers. The Sabbath of the Passover.

The details of passion week are given by this evangelist with fulness, and with apposite references to the Scriptures which were fulfilled. In the last scenes strong contrasts are brought out. Jesus witnesses a good confession, while Peter denies Him. Judas goes out in despair to hang Himself—Jesus is led out in holy meekness to be crucified. Friends reverently bury the Lord, and Mary Magdalene and the other Mary “sit over against the sepulchre”—the chief priests and Pharisees “make the sepulchre sure,” that it may retain His body, “sealing the stone and setting a watch.”

V. The resurrection, and the commission to the apostles (chap. xxviii.)

To the last, Matthew is true to his characteristics. Writing in Palestine, and, in the first instance, for the Jews, he is careful to expose the falsehood and absurdity of the report which had been concocted at Jerusalem, and circulated throughout the nation, that Jesus had not risen, but that His disciples had stolen away His body while all the watch of soldiers slept. Then, being himself a Galilean, and having given in his narrative great prominence to the ministry in Galilee, Matthew, so soon as he has affirmed the resurrection, shows us the Lord returning to that province, and meeting His disciples at a mountain there by appointment. The Risen One is still the Prophet who instructs disciples; but He is also the King. Jerusalem has rejected Him; but He has received from the Father "all power in heaven and in earth." This is the "Heir of all things." The first sentence of this Gospel traces His descent from Abraham. The last sentence recalls the promise to Abraham, that in his seed all nations of the earth shall be blessed, for it is the command of Christ to the eleven—"Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations."

St. Matthew shows us the great Prophet on three mountains, all of them in Galilee. (1.) The mountain of the Beatitudes, on which He taught the things that concerned the kingdom of heaven. (2.) The mountain of Transfiguration, on which He conferred with the two eminent prophets—Moses and Elijah. (3.) The mountain of the appointed meeting after the resurrection, where He commissioned those who were to go out—preach, baptize, and teach in His name. But what is this to us? Where is this kingdom of heaven? It is where disciples are, where the baptized are, where the teachers and the taught abide in Christ's word—for heaven is there on earth. The Lord Himself is there. The King is with His subjects; the Prophet with His disciples—"alway, even to the consummation of the age."

ST. MARK.

MATTHEW was one of the twelve apostles. There is no evidence that Mark was even a follower of Christ during His earthly ministry; but he was afterwards a companion of apostles, and composed his narrative from apostolic information and testimony. Without doubt, he is the "Marcus, my son," mentioned in the First Epistle of St. Peter, and it may therefore be assumed that he was converted through that apostle's word. He has also been very generally identified with "John, surnamed Mark," the nephew of Barnabas, of whom we read frequently in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of St. Paul.

About the Gospel written by Mark there has always been the same belief in the Christian Church—viz., that this is substantially the account of his Lord and Master given by Simon Peter. One of the earliest writers, Papias, calls Mark "the interpreter of Peter." Irenæus calls him "the disciple and interpreter of Peter," and says, "He gave forth to us in writing the things which were preached by Peter." Similar testimony comes from Clement of Alexandria and others.

It is corroborated by internal evidence. The book before us has quite the Petrine energy and impulse. Its connective words are "straightway," "quickly," "immediately;"* and the narrative never lingers, always moves on. It mentions scarcely anything of which Peter was not an eye-witness; and it has the graphic touches which indicate personal observation. It omits several things related by the other evangelists as reflecting

* These various terms stand for the one Greek word *εὐθέως*, which occurs no fewer than forty-one times in this short Gospel.

honour on Peter, while it explicitly tells whatever was fitted to humble him. Thus, it is not mentioned that he walked on the sea; or that, when he made confession of his faith, the Lord pronounced him blessed, as a man taught of the Father; or that he was the first apostle who saw the Master after His resurrection. On the other hand, it is told that Peter tried to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem to "be killed," and was "rebuked." The sin of Peter in denying his Lord is given in the fullest detail, with the fact, stated nowhere else, that the cock "crew twice:" and it is simply said that "Peter wept"—not "wept bitterly." It is carefully recorded, that Mary Magdalene was the first human being to see the Lord after the resurrection; but the only mention of the apostle Peter is this,—“The angels said to the woman, Go your way, tell His disciples and Peter, that He goeth before you into Galilee.” All this bespeaks the right feeling of that great apostle, and the holy tenderness with which, in old age, he recalled the bearing of the Lord toward himself in certain passages of his history that he could never forget.

It is strange that this book should ever have been taken for a mere abbreviation of that which precedes it. True, that many of the things told by Mark are also described by Matthew, but the second evangelist is quite independent of the first, and has his own characteristics.

There is a tradition that St. Mark wrote from Rome. At all events, his Gospel has not the Jewish aspect of St. Matthew's, but seems to have been intended mainly for Gentile Christians. It is, therefore, very sparing of quotations from the Old Testament. Aramaic expressions are given, as they lingered in the memory of the apostle Peter, but are then interpreted, as—“Talitha-Cumi, which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise;” “Ephphatha, that is, Be opened;” “Corban, that is to say, A gift;” “Abba,” “Father;” “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” In the style there are frequent

Latinisms ;* and there is a certain Latin directness—a Roman vigour throughout all the narrative.

The graphic strokes of St. Mark have been noticed by all careful readers. They show not only the careful observation of Peter as a companion of the Lord, but also the minute accuracy with which Mark reported the words of the venerable apostle. This evangelist tells how Jesus looked, and deeply sighed ; what emotions He displayed, and what impression was produced on the multitude. Moreover, in many scenes that are described by the other evangelists, Mark, by the addition of a few words, increases the vividness of the picture.

He does not record discourses of our Lord at length. He has only four parables—one of them peculiar to this Gospel, viz., that of the seed growing secretly ;† and they all relate to “the kingdom of God,” not “the kingdom of heaven.” The great characteristic of the book is its practical tone. Jesus speaks in it by His mighty acts. While Matthew tells deliberately and systematically what “came to pass,” and how it fulfilled the Scriptures of the prophets, Mark has no pauses or comments, but carries on the history with energy from scene to scene ; and if he does relate at any length the sayings of the Lord, selects those of controversy and decision. The nucleus of the whole seems to lie in words which Simon Peter spoke in the house of Cornelius at Cæsarea. The Gospel is given as that “which was published throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached ; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power ; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil ; for God was with Him. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem ; whom they slew and hanged on a tree : Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He

* κρίββατος, σπεκουλάτωρ, πραιώριον.

† Chap. iv. 26-29.

rose from the dead."* This statement finds a perfect expansion in the work of St. Mark.

The first sentence furnishes the title—"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Jesus is usually addressed as Rabbi or Teacher; and the title "Lord" is with evident purpose omitted. It is used by no one but the Gentile woman of Syrophenicia. Matthew describes the leper as saying—"Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean;" but Mark has it—"If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." Matthew makes the disciples at the Last Supper say, when they heard of a traitor—"Lord, is it I?" But Mark has simply—"Is it I?" Matthew makes the disciples in the tempest cry—"Lord, save us, we perish." Mark has it—"Teacher, carest thou not that we perish?" Matthew makes Peter say on the mount—"Lord, it is good for us to be here;" but Mark has it—"Rabbi, it is good for us to be here." We have no doubt that these instances indicate the judgment of the apostle Peter, that the title "Lord" was properly applicable to the Saviour only when He had passed from His humiliation into His state of exaltation. This is confirmed by the fact that, in the very end of this Gospel, the title is used—"So then the Lord Jesus, after He had spoken unto them, was received up into heaven. . . . They preached everywhere, the Lord working with them." It is also in harmony with the manner of Peter's address on the day of Pentecost—"God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Let us examine the structure, and survey the contents, of this book. It has been described as a series of victorious onslaughts on the part of Christ, followed by withdrawals from the scene of conflict. We prefer to call it a record of earnest, vigorous, gracious activities, with notices of those solemn pauses and times of retirement, which the Master gave to Himself and His disciples. Within the space of nine chapters, the Evangelist mentions eight occasions on which Jesus sought absolute solitude for quiet and for prayer.

* Acts x. 37-41

I. The introduction is concise (chap. i. 1-13). Nothing is said of the birth or childhood either of the Forerunner or of the Saviour. There is no mention of Bethlehem. Joseph is never named in any part of this Gospel; and Mary only once in an incidental question.* This book is written with a view to tell the public career and action of "Jesus the Son of God;" so it begins with the appearance of the Baptist in the prime of his manhood, and the emerging of Jesus from the obscurity of Nazareth to be baptized by John in the river Jordan. The account is brief, and that of the Temptation briefer still. Yet, there Mark has something to tell, which neither Matthew nor Luke has mentioned—"He was with the wild beasts." He was the second man, the last Adam, having dominion over the beasts of the field, and beginning even in a wilderness to restore Paradise.

II. Mighty acts in Galilee (chap. i. 14-ix.)

Like the parallel division of the first Gospel, this part commences from the date of John's imprisonment. Whenever the Forerunner was silenced, He who should come after him began to display His wisdom and power. So, the evangelist shows us Jesus preaching in the northern region of Palestine—calling His first disciples by the sea-shore—teaching with authority at Capernaum—healing diseases, and casting out unclean spirits. At the end of the first chapter, the Mighty One withdraws from notice for a season—a thing which Mark is specially careful to record—"Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places."

Then the ministry is resumed at Capernaum with the healing of a paralytic; the multitude are filled with wonder; the traditionists are offended; more disciples are called, so as to complete the number of the twelve. The hostility of the scribes and Pharisees becomes more intense; and Jesus moves to and fro—journeys to the coasts of Tyre, to the region of Decapolis, to the parts of Dalmanutha, and to the towns of

* Chap. vi. 3.

Cæsarea-Philippi. The precision with which every incident of those journeys is related proves the information to have been furnished by one who was a close companion of the Saviour, and a witness of His mighty works. Thus, it is said that, when Jesus would heal the deaf man at Decapolis, "He took him aside from the multitude;" when He opened the eyes of the blind man at Bethsaida, "He took him by the hand, and led him out of the town;" when the demoniac child was "as one dead, insomuch that many said, He is dead," Jesus "took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose."

In the end of this part we find the Redeemer in Capernaum again, teaching His disciples, and preparing for the journey to Jerusalem, where He should be delivered into the hand of men, and be killed, and rise again the third day.

III. The journey to Jerusalem (chap. x.)

The narrative is condensed, but wonderfully full of interest. The good Master meets the opposition of the Pharisees, and exposes the earthliness of their views; sets forth the true nature of the kingdom of God, and the necessity of entering it as little children; raises the thoughts of His disciples above earthly treasures, and again prepares them for His own sufferings, and the ordeal through which they must pass at Jerusalem. At Jericho, on this journey, He gives the last proof of His healing power recorded in this book, in opening the eyes of Bartimeus, who thereupon, filled with gratitude and drawn by love, follows Jesus in the way.

IV. Passion week in Jerusalem (chaps. xi.-xv.)

The events of that solemn time are narrated very much as they are by St. Matthew. But St. Mark has his special touches here also. Thus, only he tells where and how the ass was found, that was used for the triumphal entry. We feel sure that Peter must have been one of the two disciples who were sent to fetch it, when we read the minute statement—

“They went their way, and found the colt tied at the door without in the open street ; and they loose him.”

Only he, writing of the fig-tree which had leaves and no fruit, contributes the information, that “the time of figs was not yet.” Therefore, it could not be that the tree had been stripped of its ripe fruit. Its leaves were those of an ostentatious barrenness—fit emblem of the degenerate Judaism of that time. We also have from Mark the observation, which surely came from an eye-witness,—“the fig-tree was dried up from the roots.”

Only he tells that the woman who anointed Jesus in the house of Simon at Bethany, “broke the alabaster flask.” It is just such an incident as Simon Peter would have remembered and appreciated.

Only he tells of the young man who was seized in the garden as a follower of Jesus, and fled, leaving his linen cloak behind him. From what is told of his dress, he appears to have been a Jewish ascetic, not wearing the “sindon” or linen cloak over his other apparel according to custom, but casting it about his naked body, in token of unusual rigour in self-denial and self-mortification.* This apparition in the night has probably a symbolical meaning. Under the law, the high priest took two goats for a sin-offering on the great day of atonement. The one was to be slain ; the other, with Israel’s sins confessed on its head, to be sent away into the wilderness. The one expressed atonement for sin by the shedding of blood ; the other the removal of sin far away into a land of eternal oblivion. This double type in the law seems to have found a visible counterpart. The man Christ Jesus and the young man unnamed were taken at the same time by force. The one went to die, that His precious blood might atone for the sins of His people ; the other went away into darkness naked, and in that condition of shame, vanished in the night. The uncertainty as to whither he went, coupled with the fact that he is never seen or mentioned again, com-

* We attach no credit to the tradition that this young man was no other than Mark himself.

pletes the correspondence with the scape-goat—"the goat for Azazel." There is at least a suggestive correspondence with the ancient rite; although in our redemption the young man in the linen cloth is nothing, and Christ is all in all. By Him we have alike the expiation of our sins, and their banishment into eternal oblivion.

V. The resurrection and ascension (chap. xvi.)

Here the narrative is as brief as that of Matthew; and some would make it still more brief, for the authenticity of ver. 9-20 is much disputed. We are glad that the passage has been retained in the Revised Version. It is hardly possible to think that this book ended with the statement that the women "were afraid." In the Greek it would have ended with the insignificant word *γάγ*. Possibly the last page of the original manuscript was lost, and this paragraph subsequently added. Whether it was composed by St. Mark or by some other disciple, it is certainly ancient, and carries canonical authority. It seems to us an apposite and worthy conclusion. Therein we have the appearance of Christ to Mary Magdalene; the visit of the Lord to the disciples while they sat at meat,* and the charge to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

Nothing is said of the time, long or short, spent by the Risen One on the earth. We have to go elsewhere to learn that the time was forty days. But here we have a statement of the ascension in terms of noble simplicity—"So then, the Lord Jesus, after He had spoken unto them, was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God." It is well added by Mark, as the mouth-piece of that Simon Peter who had grown old in his apostolate, and had seen in many places the power of the Lord to obtain victories by the Gospel—"They went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen."

* Compare Acts x. 40, 41.

At first, Jesus ordained twelve, "that they should be with Him." This had been their privilege, and this their only strength in the days of His sojourn on the earth. But it was expedient that He should go away, and sit down on the right hand of God. After the Ascension, his servants on earth could not be "with Him;" but He was "with them," living in them, and working with them, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

St. Matthew has it as a word of assurance—"Lo! I am with you always." St. Mark has it as a fact of which there were abundant proofs when he wrote. The Lord had been with His servants. Nay, more—the Lord had wrought with them, and confirmed the word with signs following. Thus closes the gospel of action. Having shown us Christ the Son of God working His mighty works on earth, it ends by showing that He, though now received up into heaven, still works mightily in and by His servants on the earth. Let us ask Him to give to us the word with freshness, and to confirm it by such signs as the Church of the present day needs, and the world will be forced to acknowledge as divine—consciences pricked, pride subdued, hearts changed, lives amended, evil dispositions cast out, spiritual infirmities and moral disorders healed.

ST. LUKE.

LUKE or Lucas is the same name as Lucanus, as Silas is also Silvanus. The Latin poet Lucan, the author of the "Pharsalia," was a contemporary as well as namesake of our evangelist, but the fame of the former fades away, while that of the latter ever grows. Our Luke appears to have been a Gentile. He may have been a proselyte to "the Jews' religion" before he joined the Church of Christ. It is certain that he was already a Christian when he met St. Paul at Troas.* Thereafter he became a companion, and proved himself an attached and faithful friend, of that great apostle. Besides the charm of intellectual and spiritual sympathy, he must have been of service and comfort to St. Paul in his infirmities, for Luke was a physician—"the beloved physician." This does not imply rank, for the freed-men were often trained as physicians; but it does imply education and culture; and of these qualifications the two works we have from the pen of St. Luke give considerable evidence.

There is a legend of his having been a painter; and this has led to the placing of academies of painting under his saintly protection. One of our recent poets exclaims:—

"Give honour unto Luke, evangelist,
For he it was (the ancient legends say)
Who first taught Art to fold her hands and pray." †

But it is a mere idle legend, and not very ancient. There was a Florentine painter of the twelfth century, named Luca Santo; and there was an earlier Greek hermit of the name of

* Acts xvi. 11.

† Rossetti.

Lucas, who used to paint the Blessed Virgin. In all likelihood, one or other of these executed the old dark pictures and images now ascribed in Italy to St. Luke.

This Gospel is addressed—quite in the Greek manner, not Jewish—to Theophilus, an esteemed Christian friend of the evangelist. Him we suppose to have been an Italian; for Luke always explains to him the positions and distances of towns in Judea and Galilee; but when in the Acts of the Apostles (also written for Theophilus) he has to mention Syracuse, Rhegium, Puteoli, Appii-Forum, and The Three Taverns near Rome, he does not think it needful to give any such explanations.

Written, as this Gospel is, by a Gentile to a Gentile, it has peculiar attractions for us. Not that there is any denial of the priority of Israel. Indeed, it is here that we have the angelic promise, that the Lord God would give to Jesus “the throne of His father David.” It is here that emphasis is laid on a certain afflicted woman being “a daughter of Abraham,” and on Zaccheus being “a son of Abraham.” But words and aspects of grace to the Gentiles, and to mankind at large, are recorded too; and, in reading these pages, we feel that we have got out of a mere Hebrew zone of thought, and are receiving the gospel of humanity.

It appears from the dedication that various fragmentary and rudimental memoirs of the Lord Jesus were already in circulation. These are not to be confounded with the apocryphal Gospels which are extant, and which are evidently of a later date, and full of fables. The records to which Luke refers have perished, having been completely eclipsed and superseded by the canonical writings.

The evangelist proposed to himself to write the life of Christ with strict accuracy, and to “set in order” things of which Theophilus had already been informed by preachers. To this task he addressed himself carefully; and, in consequence, his work has more of the character of consecutive history than any of the other Gospels. Materials are diligently gathered, and

facts are woven together into a very complete narrative, with copious references and dates in true historical style. There is also a larger sweep than is taken by Matthew or Mark, for this book carries us back anterior to the birth of the Forerunner, and forward to the ascension of Jesus Christ, and the return of His disciples to Jerusalem with great joy. It begins with a priest of the Old Covenant burning incense in the Temple of the Lord—the multitude praying without. It ends with the disciples of the New Covenant “in the Temple, praising and blessing God.”

Let us point out in detail a few of the characteristics of this book not yet adverted to.

1. It has traces of St. Luke's profession. He dwells much on the healing of the sick, and the devotion of the Master to this way of doing good. He tells of the mission, not of the twelve only, but also of the seventy to “preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick.” Only he mentions the proverb quoted by our Lord at Nazareth—“Physician, heal thyself.” More minutely than others, he defines the condition of the afflicted ones brought to Jesus. He says—The leper was “full of leprosy;” the centurion's servant was “sick and ready to die;” Simon's wife's mother “was ill of a great fever” (a technical term); the woman infirm for eighteen years “was bowed together so that she could in nowise lift up herself;” the woman with an issue of blood “had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any.” This last case Mark expresses very unceremoniously, as he would have received it from Simon Peter—“She had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.” Luke, however, is most explicit about the emanation of healing virtue from the Saviour—“Jesus said, Somebody hath touched Me; for I perceive that virtue has gone out of Me.”—“The whole multitude sought to touch Him; for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all.” *

* Chap. viii. 46; vi. 19.

2. Stress is laid on our Lord's humanity. We mean by this, that he was both human and humane.

In this book, the human existence of Jesus is laid parallel to our own. He is "the fruit of the womb;" the babe or infant; the child; and then the boy.* His subjection in childhood to Joseph and Mary, and His increase in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man, are mentioned here and only here. So also we are indebted to Luke for the information that, at His baptism, Jesus was "about thirty years of age." Then, all through the history, prominence is given to the human feelings, sympathies, and sufferings of our Lord.

This was congenial to the evangelist, for evidently he also was a man humane and tender-hearted. He always indicates whatever specially appealed to gentleness or pity. Thus, it is he who tells that the children brought to Jesus were "infants" (a circumstance unfortunately overlooked by the painters); that the daughter of Jairus was an "only daughter;" and the demoniac boy at the foot of the mount of transfiguration an "only child."

St. Luke takes more notice than others of the women of gospel story. Much that we know of the Virgin Mary is derived from this Gospel exclusively, and all that we know of her cousin Elizabeth. It is here that the women whom Christ had healed, and who ministered to Him of their substance, are named—Mary Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susannah. And, though we have much that is deeply interesting about Martha and her sister Mary in the fourth Gospel, it is here, and here only, that we find the exquisite little story of Christ's visit to their house—Martha's anxious busy hospitality, and Mary's quiet attention to His word.

Widows in particular are remembered by St. Luke. Only here we read of Anna in the Temple, "a widow of about fourscore and four years;" and of the importunate widow in the

* βρέφος, παιδίον, πᾶσι.

parable ; and of the widow of Nain following the dead body of her "only son" to the grave. In the last-named instance, the evangelist is careful to say that, "when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not!" also, that when He raised the dead man, "He delivered him to his mother."

All the parables as recorded by Luke have a specially human and humane aspect. They are not given as illustrations of a kingdom. Matthew always begins—"The kingdom of heaven is like unto," &c. Luke never thus, except in the parables of the mustard-seed, and leaven.* His style is this—"A sower went forth to sow;" "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho;" "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully;" "A certain man made a great supper;" "A certain man had two sons;" "A certain man had a fig-tree;" "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen."

3. Special heed is given to what concerns the salvation of sinners. In this we may trace the influence or stamp which St. Luke's mind received from St. Paul; at all events, the harmony of his mind with that of the great preacher to the Gentiles. It is here, and only here, that we read of the woman who was a sinner, that came to Jesus' feet; of the salvation which came to the house of Zaccheus on the day when our Lord entered it; and of the grace shown to the dying robber on the cross. Here, too, and here only, that we have the publican praying in the Temple as a sinner, and going down to his house justified; and the series of parables, so encouraging to those who feel their unworthiness—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son, that were found with joy.

4. There is frequent mention of prayer. St. Luke it is who mentions, that Jesus "was praying" when the Holy Ghost descended upon Him; that He retired into the wilderness and prayed; that He went up into a mountain, and continued all night in prayer before He appointed the twelve

* Chap. xiii. 18-21.

apostles ; that, on the mount of transfiguration, "He was praying," when "the fashion of His countenance was altered ;" and that, when Jesus "was praying in a certain place, when He had ceased, one of His disciples said to Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." In this Gospel, too, it is that we find those parables which encourage prayer. These are, (1), the story of the man who knocked at his neighbour's door till he got bread ; (2), that of the unjust judge and the widow ; and (3), that of the Pharisee and the publican.

The stress thus laid upon prayer is another indication of what may be called the Pauline tone of St. Luke's mind, and consequently of his Gospel.

So much of the characteristics of this book. When we try to epitomise its contents, and arrange them in divisions, we find some difficulty from the continuous strain of the history, which glides on without break or interruption. But, after the inscription or dedication to Theophilus, we may trace the following six parts :—

I. Details of the annunciation and nativity (chaps. i., ii.) These are peculiar to this Gospel.

We have the parentage, promise, and actual birth of the Forerunner, John. We have the annunciation, conception, and nativity of Jesus. The narrative is beautified with holy songs, and describes the meek faith and joy of the blessed Virgin.

The vision of angels seen by the shepherds is told by Luke only, as the vision of the star seen by the magi is related by Matthew only. All Christendom speaks of the song of the angels, but the evangelist has no such expression. "There was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." To sing like an angel has become proverbial, but it will be found that the sacred writers never describe an angel as singing. Songs belong to the Redeemer and the redeemed.

In the beginning of this Gospel, and nowhere else, we read of

Simeon and Anna, and of those "who looked for redemption in Jerusalem;" also of the visit of Jesus to the capital, at the age of twelve years, and His conversation with the doctors in the Temple.

II. The introduction to the ministry (chaps. iii.—iv. 13).—This consists, as in the first Gospel, mainly of these three: the preaching of John the Baptist with awakening effect; the baptism of Jesus by John; and His temptation in the wilderness.

III. The ministry in Galilee (chap. iv. 14—ix. 50).—Matthew at once describes Jesus as preaching the nearness of the kingdom of heaven; and the first discourse reported by him is the sermon concerning the beatitudes of the kingdom, and its laws of righteousness. But Luke shows Him in the synagogue at "Nazareth, where He had been brought up," preaching the Gospel to the poor, and proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord. The great discourse, or sermon on the mount, he gives at a later period, in an abbreviated form, and without any mention of the kingdom.

Though the parables and miracles do not all fall within this division, it is convenient to speak of them here. St. Luke narrates more parables than St. Matthew, and about the same number of miracles. Peculiar to him are the parables of the two debtors, the good Samaritan, the friend at midnight, the rich fool, the barren fig-tree, the great supper, the lost drachma, the prodigal son, the unjust steward, the rich man and Lazarus, the unprofitable servants, the unjust judge, the Pharisee and the publican, and the talents. Peculiar also to him are the following miracles:—The first draught of fishes, the raising of the widow's son, the healing of a woman with a spirit of infirmity, and of a man with the dropsy, the cleansing of ten lepers, and the healing of Malchus. This enumeration shows us at a glance what a valuable addition to our knowledge of Christ we obtain from the pen of St. Luke.

IV. The journey to Jerusalem (chap. ix. 51—xix. 44).—This is described with fulness. We see the Lord wending His way slowly through Galilee and Samaria, healing and teaching; sending out the Seventy in His name; confuting and reproving the scribes and Pharisees, and preparing His own mind and those of His immediate companions for His rejection and decease at Jerusalem.

His approach to the capital is related with great pathos, and at the same time with the most scrupulous accuracy. Whether one takes the route from Bethany over the southern shoulder or that over the crest of Olivet, there is a first glimpse of Jerusalem, which is soon lost through inequality of the ground, and then suddenly a splendid view of the entire city. The evangelist distinctly indicates this. The first view is implied in the words—“And when He was come nigh, even now at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice.” While the attendant multitude rejoiced, and Jesus replied to the murmuring Pharisees, they were passing over the intermediate dip in the ground. Then, we have the second and much clearer view of Jerusalem, with its effect on the Saviour’s mind, in the sentence—“And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it.”* Luke is true to his plan of writing a gospel of humanity, when he shows us the Saviour’s tears.

V. The Passion (chap. xix. 45—xxiii.)—The days of passion-week are not marked so carefully as they are by St. Matthew; but there is a full report of our Lord’s controversy with His enemies in the Temple, and of His discourse of encouragement and prophecy to His disciples. One story of this period Luke has in common with Mark; and it is not found in Matthew, viz., that of the widow who cast her two mites into the treasury. “And He looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury,” &c.† It seems strange that our Lord “looked up” to the treasury; but the explanation is easily

* Chap. xix. 37, 41.

† Chap. xxi. 1.

found in the parallel narrative—"And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury."* Being in a sitting posture, the Lord must have looked up to observe those who cast in their offerings. It is a small point, but every one knows how the minuteness of a coincidence may increase its evidential value.

In the account of the last supper, we are again reminded of the intimacy between St. Luke and St. Paul. The account given by the former, differing as it does somewhat from that of the other evangelists, agrees with the language of the well-known passage in 1 Corinthians xi. St. Luke has, after the giving of the bread, the words—"Do this in remembrance of me"—which Matthew and Mark have not, but Paul has. He seems also, like Paul, to mark a pause or interval between the bread and the wine; and has the words—"This cup is the New Covenant in my blood"—while Matthew and Mark have—"This is my blood of the New Covenant."

We have said that the healing of Malchus in the garden, and the penitence of one of the crucified robbers, are found in this Gospel only. So also is the arraignment of Christ before Herod. St. Luke seems to give us a Roman rather than a Jewish account of our Saviour's trials and sufferings; and it has been plausibly conjectured that he, while living at Cæsarea, the chief seat of the Roman garrison, gathered details from some of the soldiers who had been under Pontius Pilate's orders at Jerusalem. This would account for his intimate knowledge of things which could not come under the direct cognizance of persons without the judgment hall, or standing at a distance from the cross, but which the soldiers in charge of the prisoner must have seen and heard. It may be added, that it is Luke who gives us the name of the place of death as Calvary. The other three evangelists use the Hebrew name Golgotha.

VI. The Resurrection and Ascension (chap. xxiv.)—This section has great interest and value. It describes the early

* Mark xii. 41.

discovery by the women of the emptiness of the tomb, and Peter's unfeigned amazement when he verified the fact. There follows an account of our Lord's walk with two disciples to Emmaus, and their recognition of Him "in the breaking of bread." If this had been represented as His first appearing on that day, it would have contradicted other accounts; but it is not so. When the two disciples hastened back from Emmaus to Jerusalem, they were told of an appearing of Christ prior to that which had been vouchsafed to them—"The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon." Now, of this interview we have no other mention by the evangelists; but it is important to notice the corroboration by St. Paul—"He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve."*

Much stress is laid on the connection between the passion and the resurrection; and this also is a favourite theme with St. Paul. Three times we have it in the last chapter of this Gospel—"The Son of man must be crucified, and the third day rise again"—"Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to have entered into His glory?"—"It behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day." In like manner, in the Epistles of Paul, we read of Jesus "delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification;" self-humbled, and therefore by God highly exalted.

True to the last to the human aspect of his Gospel, St. Luke describes the Risen One as breaking bread, and even eating of fish and honey-comb, to assure His disciples of the reality of His body; speaking of it as having "flesh and bones;" and showing His hands and feet which had been pierced upon the cross. Then is related the ascension of the Man of love, blessing with outstretched hands, and carried up into heaven to obtain from the Father, and to shed forth upon the disciples, the best of blessings—the power of the Holy Ghost.

Such in brief is this inestimable narrative. It begins with joy at the Nativity; and it ends with great joy at the Ascension.

* 1 Cor. xv. 4, 5.

It brings Jesus very near, as One with whom we may enjoy companionship. The Saviour here described is not a being who is neither quite a God nor quite a man, but One who, being verily God, also became verily man. This is our flesh and blood. "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same." *

This comes well before the Gospel according to St. John, which is the record of the Son of God. Under St. Luke's guidance, we trace the Son of man from His mother's womb to the cross and the grave, and from the grave to heaven. Our Lord's return to the Father is represented rather as an assumption than an ascension into heaven. "He was parted from them, and carried up."

* Heb. ii. 14.

ST. JOHN.

THIS is the spiritual Gospel—the most filled with the glory of the Son of God—the most imbued with His mind—and the most occupied with His own words of eternal life. We must read it, while with joy, also with deep reverence, for heaven lies about us, and a cloud of glory hangs upon the page. All devout students have spoken of this book with peculiar veneration and tenderness. It is finely said by a German author—“In the perusal of St. John’s writings, I always feel as if I saw him before me at the Last Supper, lying on his Master’s breast. I am far from understanding all that I read, and often it seems to me as if St. John’s meaning were floating at a distance before my eyes ; still even then, when I am gazing into a passage altogether dark to me, I have yet a strong presentiment of some great and glorious thought which I shall one day be able to understand.”*

There is no need to expatiate on this evangelist’s personal history. The son of Zebedee and Salome, the brother of James, the intimate friend of Peter, the youngest of the apostles, and the survivor of them all—John is as well known as Paul himself throughout all the Church.

This book is certainly one of the last written in our New Testament. There are internal indications of its having been composed after the fall of Jerusalem. Thus—“Bethany *was* nigh unto Jerusalem.” “He went forth with His disciples over the brook Cedron, where *was* a garden.” “In the place where He was crucified there *was* a garden.” After the siege and fall

* Claudius, quoted by Besser.

of Jerusalem, no doubt gardens were devastated, and the general aspect of localities greatly changed. True, we read—"There *is* at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool;" but this does not weaken our inference, because the pool of Bethesda is known to have remained long after the Roman destruction of the city. Internal evidence, in fact, supports the old tradition, that St. John wrote this work about the end of the first century.* The place of publication is supposed to have been Ephesus. It certainly was some place at a distance from Palestine; for John, though himself a Galilean, writes of "the Jews"—"the feast of the Jews"—"the manner of purifying of the Jews."

Let us consider (1.) The purpose of this book; (2.) Its characteristics; (3.) Its structure and contents.

I. The purpose or object of this Gospel has been variously represented.

It has been thought that John wrote in order to supplement the memoirs of Christ previously written by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Now, it is extremely probable that he had seen one or more of these books, which were well circulated before the close of the first century; and, on this very account, omitted from his work many important facts related by the previous evangelists. John says nothing of the conception and nativity of Jesus—His baptism, temptation, transfiguration, parables, exorcisms—the Lord's Supper—the agony in the garden—the ascension into heaven. On the other hand, he records many things that greatly enlarge our view of the Saviour's ministry, and help us to a more full understanding of the duration and significance of His public life than we have derived from the three preceding narratives. So far as they inform us, the ministry only began from the imprisonment of John the Baptist, and occupied about a year; but we now learn that it really

* The Neologian view, which dates this work in the second century, and ascribes the doctrine of the Logos to a disciple of Philo, has been triumphantly refuted by Luthard, Godet, Westcott, Salmon, and others. We have no room for the discussion.

covered at least two years and a quarter, and perhaps three years. Yet, history was certainly not the chief object of St. John. His purpose was deeper than that of a writer of memoirs; and the help he gives us on chronological questions is of a quite incidental, one may almost say, accidental character.

It has also been maintained, that this book was written for a controversial purpose, to confute the Gnostic heresy. Now, it is certain that St. John vehemently opposed those who denied the Son, and therein denied the Father also; and that in his old age, he contended with Cerinthus, a leader of Jewish Gnosticism at Ephesus. It is also plain that this Gospel is so written, in harmony with the three Epistles of St. John, as to furnish the Church, after his decease, with weapons of truth against the perilous errors which seducing spirits brought in. But, it is one thing for a history to be so written as to establish controverted truth; another thing for it to be written with a ruling polemical purpose. The former is fair, but the latter never commands perfect confidence. Now, this Gospel is the former, not the latter. It is a faithful record, and not a polemic in disguise.

But why theorise on the object of this book? It tells its own purpose. "These things are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life through His name.* The venerable apostle writes to elevate the whole Christian conception of Jesus, and to sustain faith in Him as the Christ, the Son of God, in whom we have life. He does not address himself to prove this by facts and reasonings, but soars at once to the heights of Divine existence, and sets out from a beginning or ever the world was. He is the teacher of Divine manifestation to man, as St. Paul is of the Divine reconciliation of man. His purpose, therefore, is to show us how the divinity was manifested in Jesus Christ upon the earth, and what unbroken union there was and is between the Father and the Son.

* Chap. xx. 31.

II. The characteristics of this book in thought and style are strongly marked.

1. In thought it is very deep—full of theology and of symbolism. It goes beyond the ordinary thinking of a narrative, —even of a sacred narrative, and has a combination of philosophical reflection with poetical elevation; while it retains a Hebrew cast of thought, and, like the Book of Revelation, has its roots deep in the Old Testament.

A succession of events is marked, but vaguely, by the phrases “after this,” “after these things.” It is no object to this evangelist to give mere notes of time. All the incidents are selected, and the conversations, discourses, and acts of Christ are grouped with a view to their inner meanings, and the expression in sign and symbol of far-reaching truths.

2. In style St. John is peculiar and very effective. He has not so large a vocabulary as St. Luke, but knows how to use distinctive words. Thus, only he has “the Logos,” and “the Only Begotten,” as titles of our Saviour; “the Paraclete” as a designation of the Holy Spirit; and the description of Christ’s death as His being “lifted up.” There are also terms not exclusively his, which he employs with marked and emphatic frequency, *e.g.*, the Life, the Light, the Lamb, the Truth.

The sentences are constructed with extreme simplicity, but they are often singularly strengthened by the recurrence of important words, thus: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God;” “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not;” “If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of Me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of Me is true.”* Sentences thus formed are grouped together in paragraphs, so that the effect of the composition, while inartificial, is singularly powerful. “The multiplication of simple elements issues in a result of acknowledged grandeur. The words seem to hang about the reader till he is forced to remember them. Each great truth

* Chap. i. 1, 10; v. 31, 32.

sounds like the burden of a strain ever falling upon the ear with a calm persistency which secures attention. And, apart from forms of expression with which all are early familiarised, there is no book in the Bible which has furnished so many figures of the person and work of Christ, which have passed into the common use of Christians, as the Gospel of St. John. '*I am the Bread of Life;*' '*I am the Light of the World;*' '*I am the Good Shepherd;*' '*I am the Vine,*' are words which have guided the thoughts of believers from the first ages."*

It should also be noticed here that it is the custom of this evangelist to intersperse his narrative with reflective or explanatory comments. Matthew, Mark, and Luke never do this. They confine themselves to pure narration, only venturing to translate a foreign word, or quote an appropriate Old Testament prophecy; but John is always looking into, and thinking over, the words and actions of his Lord. Thus he explains the language of Jesus regarding the rebuilding of the Temple in three days; remarks that His question to Philip about buying bread for the multitude did not spring from any perplexity; interprets His promise of living water on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles; and accounts for the words of Caiaphas as to the expediency of one man dying for the people.†

III. The structure of the Gospel is well worthy of careful attention. It proceeds on a thoughtful symmetrical plan.

1. *The introduction, or prologue* (chap. i. 1-18). Mark goes back to the beginning of the Gospel; Matthew farther back, to Abraham; Luke still farther back, to Adam; Moses went back to the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth. But John reverts to a period yet more remote, the beginning of the manifestation of God, who yet never began, but eternally was.

This evangelist has been called "the Divine," because he is so much occupied with the Divine existence, and the manifestation

* Dr. Westcott's "Introduction to the Study of the Gospels," 4th Edition, p. 268.

† Chap. ii. 21, 22; vi. 6; vii. 39; xi. 51, 52; also chap. xii. 33.

of the Divine glory in the person of the Son. Now the Son is not created or made, but "only-begotten of the Father;" and, as such, is "a partaker of that incommunicable and imperishable essence which is sundered from all created life by an impassable chasm." * To the Son is given in this book the significant title, "the Word" (Logos), the Expression of God implying perfect declaration of the thought. The Word is the revealer and the revelation of the Invisible God.

In the introduction, the Logos is set forth, (1), in His Divine nature and efficiency, and, (2), in His relation to the world—His creatorship—His quickening and illuminating power over men—His entrance into the world by incarnation, and *tabernacling* among men. The Only Begotten is possessed of "glory," and this thought pervades the whole book. In miracles the Lord showed forth His glory; and in death the Son of Man was glorified. This prologue, in fact, furnishes a sublime basis for all true Christology; exhibiting our Lord in His relation to God, to the world, and to Israel, and in His contrast with Moses; "for the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

Brief mention is made in the introduction of witnesses to Christ. "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." He is never called the "Baptist" in this book. "The same came for a witness." And whence came he? St. Luke tells of the parentage and youth of John the Baptist, but these things are nothing to the purpose of this evangelist. In St. John's view, all things are of God. The true Light came forth from God; and the witness to that Light was "a man sent from God." Then the testimony of the witness John is corroborated by that of the apostles—"We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father." The apostle-evangelist had the most intimate friendship with Christ; but he will, on no account, name himself, even as a witness. He speaks of the Baptist as "John," and as though there was no other John than he. He is particular in his notices of his

* Canon Liddon's Bampton Lectures, 2d ed. p. 233.

fellow-apostles ; distinguishes Simon Peter from Simon Zelotes, Judas not Iscariot from Judas Iscariot ; gives the surname of Thomas, Didymus ; and mentions that Philip, Andrew, and Peter, were all of the town of Bethsaida ; but when he would allude to himself, it is as “ that other disciple,” or “ the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

2. *The manifestation and rejection of Jesus Christ* (chap. i. 19–xii.) This section develops the emphatic sayings in the prologue, that Christ was the true light of life ; that He was in the world, and the world knew Him not ; nay, that He came to His own things in Immanuel’s land, and His own people, Israel, received Him not.

In the time of His manifestation, our Lord had many witnesses ; and they are thus arrayed before us.

(1.) *The witness of John.* This is furnished in his reply to the queries of the priests and Levites from Jerusalem ; his testimony addressed to his own disciples, that Jesus was the Lamb of God who should take away the sin of the world, with a statement that he had seen the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and abiding upon Him ; the repetition on the following day of the saying—“ Behold the Lamb of God ;” and another very full and important testimony of John addressed to his disciples at Ænon, near to Salim, in which he pointed out the Son of God as the Bridegroom, and the One who, coming from heaven, is above all.

(2.) *The witness of disciples.* Those who found Christ, or were found of Him, testified of Him to others. Thus Andrew witnessed to his own brother Simon ; and Philip to Nathanael ; and the woman at Sychar to the men of that town ; and the man who was healed at Bethesda to the Jews, telling them “ that it was Jesus who had made him whole.”

(3.) *The witness of signs.* Miracles are never called by this evangelist *δυναμίεις*, mighty acts, as in the other Gospels ; but always *σημεῖα*, signs—expressing the character of Jesus, and showing forth His glory. Their influence in attracting faith, as well as admiration, is particularly dwelt upon. Thus, it is

written, "This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed on Him."—"Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover on the feast-day, many believed in His name, when they saw the signs which He did."*

The Lord referred also to other, and even higher witness—the testimony of His Father in the ancient Scriptures, wherein Moses and the prophets wrote of Him. And the truth established by so many witnesses was always this: that He was the Son of God, and that He had not come of Himself, but the Father had sent Him.

Now let us trace the manifestation.

(1.) To the Jews (chap. ii. 13–iii.)

According to this Gospel, Jesus repaired early in His ministry to Jerusalem. He, whose right it was to reign, came to the capital city; but not yet to claim the throne. His first work was to cleanse the Temple; and this He did as the Son of God—purging His Father's house. Of the miracles which He wrought at that feast in Jerusalem we have no detailed account, but they induced many to believe on His name; and a ruler of the Jews, named Nicodemus, went so far as to visit Jesus by night, and make this avowal—"Rabbi, we know that Thou art a Teacher come from God; for no man can do these signs which Thou doest, except God be with him." Then to this representative man of Jerusalem, our Lord unfolded earthly and heavenly things, affirming the necessity of regeneration, and the love of God in redemption.

After this, Jesus retired for a little, with His disciples into the rural parts of Judea. The next stage of His manifestation was—

(2.) To the Samaritans (chap. iv. 4–42).

The Saviour made Himself known to a sinful woman by Jacob's well at Sychar, forgetting hunger, thirst, and weariness in the joy of finding one sheep that was lost, one child that

* Chap. ii. 11–23. See also chap. iv. 46–54; v. 36; vi. 14; vii. 31; x. 21, 37, 38, 41, 42; xi. 4, 45.

had gone astray. Her case contrasts with that of Nicodemus at Jerusalem. The Pharisee was told of the birth of water and of the Spirit, and of the redeeming love of God ; but he went away in the night, afraid of the Jews, and for the time held his peace. This woman was told of the water of life, of worship in the Spirit, and of the Father's love ; and she, having no Pharisaic pride to combat, or Pharisaic position to forfeit, spoke with a changed heart and roused conscience, and could not hold her peace—"Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did : is not this the Christ ?" The Lord went into the town of Sychar, and tarried there. He did no mighty works. Miracles or signs were not asked for, because conscience was at work among the Samaritans, and many believed because of His word.

(3.) To the Galileans (chap. iv. 43-54). The people of the northern province did not hunger for His word as did the Samaritans. Except they saw signs and wonders they would not believe ; and such reception as they gave Him was only for His works' sake. Now, here also one prominent case is quoted. As at Jerusalem we have seen Jesus conversing with Nicodemus, and in Samaria, Jesus talking with the woman of Sychar ; so also in Galilee, we see Jesus answering the supplication of "a certain nobleman" from Capernaum. But He went not into the town as He had done at Sychar, because it was a work of healing, not the word of salvation, that was sought. The son of the nobleman was cured ; and the father "himself believed, and his whole house."

It is impossible not to mark a design in these successive narratives. Jesus visits the three great divisions of the country, showing Himself mighty in word and deed ; and in each, a representative person is brought into near communication with Him.

Then the story returns to Jerusalem. Jesus stands alone, maintaining against the Jews His claim to be the Son of God sent into the world. By "the Jews," we are to understand the rulers and leaders, not the multitude. When Jesus healed

an impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, they resented the act of mercy, because it was done on the Sabbath-day. They could not rise above rigid forms and legal prescriptions, or understand the divine working and super-Sabbatic authority of Jesus as the Son of God. After a while, they were again irritated by the opening of the eyes of a blind man in Jerusalem—also on the Sabbath-day.

The controversy over the first of these miracles is reported at length; and then the Lord is shown to us again in Galilee. He feeds the multitude, and He walks on the sea. He speaks marvellously in the synagogue at Capernaum of Himself as the true bread, and of the life of the world to be found in eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of Man.

Again, the Lord is in Jerusalem at the feast of Tabernacles, teaching in the Temple; vindicating His Divine mission; and, on the last and great day of the feast, inviting all who were athirst to come to Him and drink. The evangelist explains this of the gift of the Holy Spirit, which believers on Jesus were soon to receive.

The four chapters which follow illustrate the truth that Jesus Christ is light and life. They are in pairs; the first pair showing the light, and the second the life. In the 8th chapter Jesus proclaims Himself "the light of the world." He does so in the morning when the light was fading from the colossal lamp-stands of the Temple which were lit at the Feast of Tabernacles, and the sun which illuminates the world was rising in the East. There ensued a sharp conflict of words with the Jews, who at last took up stones to stone Him whom they could not confute. But "He went out of the Temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by." The 9th chapter continues and completes the manifestation of the light. Jesus, having affirmed His own dignity as "the light of the world," displays His power by opening the eyes of a man who had been "blind from his birth." The 10th chapter reveals our Saviour as the life, having such sayings as these: "I am come that they may have life;" "I give unto them eternal

life." Then, as the 9th chapter illustrated His enlightening power, the 11th exhibits His quickening power. He raises Lazarus from the dead, and shows Himself to be "the resurrection and the life."

The 12th chapter closes this great division of the Gospel, and seals the condemnation of the Jews. The Son of God was manifested and rejected. Certain Greeks inquired after Him, but of the Jews it is thus written: "Though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him." His last testimony to the people of Jerusalem is given in these solemn sentences: "Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on Me, believeth not on Me, but on Him that sent Me: and he that seeth Me seeth Him that sent Me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on Me may not abide in the darkness. And if any man hear My words, and keep them not, I judge him not; for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My sayings, hath One that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge Him in the last day. For I have not spoken for Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life eternal: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak."*

3. *The Passion* (chaps. xiii.—xix.) St. John does not relate the institution of the Lord's Supper, though he refers to the Pascal Feast, and describes an action of Jesus after supper which had a deep symbolic meaning,—the washing of the disciples' feet.

Peculiar to this Gospel is the record of many gracious words spoken by Christ between the last supper and the betrayal into the hands of His enemies. First there is a conversation, in which Peter, Thomas, Philip, and Jude all take part. Then the Lord pours out a long and sweet discourse of love, union, peace, fruit-bearing, consolation of the Spirit, and victory over

* Chap. xii. 44-50. ;

the world. This is again followed by his high-priestly prayer—a passage which has always been regarded as a sort of “holy of holies” in the Scripture, so full is it of sublime thought and Divine intimacy. Bengel said truly of the 17th chapter of this Gospel, that it is “in the words of it the most simple, but in the sense of it the most profound in all the Bible.”

Though this evangelist does not mention the agony in the garden, he is very explicit in regard to the trial and crucifixion of Christ. Many incidents are mentioned by him only; *e.g.*, that the band who came to take the Saviour “went backward and fell to the ground” when He confronted them; that Simon Peter was the disciple who smote the servant of the high priest; and that the servant’s name was Malchus. This last point would have come naturally within the cognisance of John, for he was acquainted with the high priest and his household; and Simon Peter being dead when this book was written, there was no longer any reason to conceal that the bold stroke of the sword was by his hand. In this Gospel only, we find our Lord’s language to Pontius Pilate about the kingdom not of this world, and the royal dignity of a witness to the truth; also the exclamation of Pilate, “*Ecce homo!*” Then, in describing the actual crucifixion, John is the only writer who tells us of the division of Christ’s garments by the soldiers; His committal of Mary His mother to this disciple’s care; and the piercing of His side after death with a spear, causing blood and water to gush out. Of this last outrage John was an eye-witness: “He that saw it bare witness, and his witness is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe.” We may add that it is in this Gospel only, that we behold Nicodemus the ruler of the Jews associated with Joseph of Arimathea in burying the body of Jesus with fragrant spices.

4. *The Resurrection and its evidence* (chap. xx.)

This section also abounds in fresh matter. It contains the beautiful story of Peter and John hastening to the sepulchre on hearing of its empty condition from Mary Magdalene.

“At dawn of morn
 From her sad couch she sprang forlorn,
 She sought to weep with Thee alone,
 And saw Thine open grave, and knew that Thou wert gone.”

It tells of the Lord's appearing and speaking to Mary Magdalene in the morning ; and then, passing by the appearings vouchsafed to the other Mary with Salome and Joanna, to Simon alone, and to the two disciples at Emmaus, relates the important visit of the Lord to His disciples in Jerusalem “on the same day at evening.”

After the salutation of peace, and the exhibition of His hands and His side to prove that it was truly He, (1.) the Lord appointed to His disciples an embassy. “As my Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.” They had seen that He had sought for Himself no earthly grandeur or kingdom of this world, but had brought light into the world by testifying of the Father. Now were they to go out and testify of Him, spreading light in the midst of darkness, and life in the midst of death ; preaching good tidings, publishing peace. (2.) Then He conferred on them a qualification. “When He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.” The Spirit had rested on Him as the Father's witness ; and the same Spirit must rest on them as His witnesses. The fulness of this blessing, however, was not enjoyed till the day of Pentecost. The Lord breathed on the disciples when He gave them their commission ; but they did not begin to act upon that commission till the Holy Ghost descended upon them in power after fifty days. (3.) Jesus also gave to the disciples on that night a high prerogative. “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” It is a gross error to interpret this of priestly shriving or absolution. It is to be explained by the parallel passage in the Gospel of St. Luke, that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached.”* And it is to be gathered from the Acts of the Apostles how this prerogative

* Luke xxiv. 46, 47.

was actually understood and used by those in whom it was vested. They made no terms with sinners, granted no indulgences, and prescribed no penance. They declared God's pardon to the penitent, and His wrath against the impenitent.* When they went further, it was in the exercise of apostolic care over the Churches, retaining sins on some for a warning, as on Ananias and Sapphira stricken with death, and Elymas with blindness, and on some excommunicated for a season, "delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord."

After eight days the Lord appeared again in like manner, to convince the apostle Thomas of His real bodily resurrection. That disciple may be called the sceptic among the twelve; not that he had anything in him of the flippant Sadducee, but that the constitution of his mind made it impossible for him to believe strange tidings, even though he wished them true, until he had evidence which his sober judgment could approve. Now, every class of honest mind, the sceptical as well as any other, has its place and use both in the Church and in the world. Our Lord receives all. He knows how to deal with the stubborn Thomas as well as with the impulsive Peter; and in satisfying the doubts of the former, removing the obstructions to his peace and joy in believing, the Saviour has furnished an additional security to us all that He has indeed risen from the dead. Even Thomas was satisfied, and, passing from joy to absolute certainty, he "answered and said unto Him, My Lord and my God."

5. *The Epilogue or supplement* (chap. xxi.) This was no doubt written by St. John, but at a later period than the rest of the book. It relates the second miraculous draught of fishes; and the breakfast on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, in which the food prepared by Jesus was joined with that which the seven disciples had caught—showing us that the joy of fellowship between the Saviour and the saved is fed alike by that which He provides directly for them, and by that which they,

* See Acts ii. 38; iii. 19; x. 43.

through His grace, and at His word, are enabled to attain. What joy was theirs on that morning, who saw the Lord, and did eat and drink in His presence, treated as His guests, fed as His children? And after the repast came another joy. Simon Peter was restored, and, having been questioned three times regarding his love to Jesus Christ, received commission as a shepherd of the flock of God. The interrogation was intended not merely to remind him gently of his three denials of his Master, but also to intimate the essential connection between love to the Chief Shepherd, and the feeding and leading of His sheep and lambs. Love is the motive that should actuate all pastors and spiritual guides; and love is the very pasture into which the lambs and sheep must be led.

Walking by the Lake, the Son of God was pleased to give prophetic hints of the martyrdom of St. Peter, and the prolonged life of St. John. Nothing is said of His ascension. Our last view is of the good Master pacing the shore, attended by Peter and John. We see not the end of that path, for, while they thus walk, the book closes—the curtain of silence falls.

To all this testimony of the evangelist, the early Church put a grateful amen—"We know that his testimony is true." We also, remote though we are in time, may add emphasis to this: we may know that the testimony of St. John is true, and may laugh to scorn the efforts of some modern critics to shake the authority of this Gospel, when we have proved its divine power over ourselves, and experienced its divine sweetness. It is a bed of spices, a hill of frankincense, a garden of pleasant fruits, in which all devout spirits may meet the Holy One—the Loving and Beloved.

Thus the four evangelical Narratives made known the Saviour.

The first, written in Palestine, showed to Israel the Messiah.
The second, written at Rome, showed to the Gentiles the mighty One.

The third, written in Greece, showed to all men the compassionate Son of Man.

The fourth, written in Asia Minor, the ancient seat of Theosophy, revealed the Logos incarnate, the Son of God.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

THIS second work of St. Luke occupies a most important position as the sequel to the Gospels, and the foundation for the Epistles. Though at some periods it has been treated with a strange neglect, it must always receive prominence and command attention whenever Church life is revived, and searching ecclesiastical questions are agitated. Nothing, indeed, tends so much as the study of the Acts of the Apostles to give men a comprehension of missionary enterprise, and a grasp of sound Church principles.

Other treatises, under the same name, were issued in the second century ; but this excels and outlives them all. Yet, the name is not very sufficient, or even accurate. Of several of the apostles no acts are described ; and, on the other hand, some are prominent in the story who never were reckoned among the apostles, *e.g.*, Stephen, Philip, and Barnabas. More properly, this is the book of the acts of the glorified Redeemer through His Spirit-guided apostles and preachers on earth. It is a continuation of St. Luke's Gospel. The former treatise, written for the use of Theophilus, recorded the beginning of the sayings and doings of Jesus. This resumes the narrative, and shows that the activity of Jesus was not stayed or even reduced by His assumption into heaven, but was put forth all the more, because He had ascended up on high, and sent down the Holy Ghost to inspirit, instruct, and extend the Church.

Much that this book contains St. Luke was able to testify as an eye-witness, for he was with St. Paul at Troas ; accompanied him to Philippi ; after some years rejoined him at Philippi,

and went with him to Jerusalem. Thereafter he was with the apostle on his way to Rome; was with him in the storm and shipwreck on the coast of Malta; and abode with him in the great city. Probably, this history was written at Rome in the year A.D. 63; for St. Paul reached that city A.D. 61, and we must allow for the two years during which he had stayed "in his own hired house." We do not make the date later than A.D. 63, because it was concluded before the issue of St. Paul's appeal to the Roman emperor.

The chronology presents some difficulties. But there are four events of secular history incidentally mentioned, the dates of which are pretty well fixed. They are these; the death in the days of Claudius Cæsar (chap. xi. 28); the death of Herod Agrippa (chap. xii. 23); the decree of Claudius expelling Jews from Rome (chap. xviii. 2); and the recall of the governor, Felix (chap. xxiv. 27). By the help of these notes of time, it can be shown that this history covers about thirty-four years; and the dates of some of the principal events in the early Church can be determined, *e.g.*, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, A.D. 37, and the holding of the Christian council at Jerusalem, A.D. 50.

The introduction (chap. i. 1-12) is of great importance. It tells us that the Lord Jesus remained on the earth for forty days after His resurrection. The time is significant. After His baptism in the river Jordan, our Lord spent forty days in the wilderness, and now, after His baptism into death, He spent forty days on the earth, being for most of that time withdrawn from human view. With the one period of withdrawal He marked the beginning, and with the other the close of His manifestation as the Saviour.

During the forty days, He put the fact of His resurrection beyond doubt; for "He showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs." The appearances were certainly twelve or thirteen in number, at various places, in various circumstances, to one, to two, to many witnesses; and, in every case, the firm conviction was produced on their minds, and avowed at the

first opportunity to others, that "it was the Lord." Moreover, during those forty days, the Master gave commandments in the Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen, and spoke of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. The Holy Ghost had not yet descended on the apostles; but Jesus spoke to them in that power, and His words were afterwards potent in their hearts, when they also had received the power from on high, and began to speak in the Spirit, preaching or heralding the kingdom of God.

This interval of time between the resurrection and ascension also availed to prepare the apostles for the manner of their Lord's future intercourse with them, and with the Church. It was a period of transition between the time when His friends could "company with Him," and the new time when He should be with them always, and yet taken out of their sight. Risen from the dead, He had a body still, but not the same bodily conditions and restrictions as before. He showed Himself, or withdrew Himself from view, at His pleasure. The disciples knew that He was always near; but could not tell when, or for how long a time, He would appear.

At last, when the forty days were completed, the Lord commanded the apostles not to depart from Jerusalem, as they, being Galileans, would naturally have done; but to "wait for the promise of the Father." Then, in their sight, He was assumed into heaven. It was a departure for a longer season, much longer than any previous withdrawal. But it is such an absence as consists with a continual presence, too; and, at an hour that men think not, it will terminate in a glorious appearing. So the apostles were assured by "two men in white apparel:"* "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go

* Angels, no doubt; but we should not say "angels assuming human form," for we have no reason to suppose that they have any other shape. They serve the Divine family; and the servants have the same form with the "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ."

into heaven." Recognise in this the secret of all the acts, and all the patience of the apostles. They knew that though the Lord had ascended, He was not far from any one of them. He had sent the Holy Spirit into their hearts. Some had glimpses of His excellent glory. Stephen saw Him ; so did Paul ; so did John. And all looked for Him to receive them to Himself. Then no more periods of absence, and no more tribulation in the world ; but "for ever with the Lord."

The key to the whole structure of this book is to be found in the introduction—"Ye shall be witnesses unto Me, (1), both in Jerusalem ; (2), in all Judea, and in Samaria ; and (3), unto the uttermost part of the earth."

I. The witnessing Church at Jerusalem (chap. i. 13-vii.)

In Galilee, "five hundred brethren at once" had assembled very recently ; but in Jerusalem the whole number of disciples who clave together after their Lord's ascension was a hundred and twenty. This number included the devout women, because, though it was not fitting that women should exercise the apostolate, or become Church rulers, discipleship and Church membership were from the first open to them equally with the other sex. In Christ Jesus there was "neither male nor female." How wise and respectful is the mention of the mother of Jesus in the primitive assembly—"The apostles continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren."* At Nazareth, in her youth, the Virgin Mary had waited meekly and trustfully for the Power of the Highest to overshadow her, in order to the conception and birth of Christ. In the same spirit she now sat and knelt among "the women," waiting for the Power of the Highest to descend in order to the birth of the Church. How different is this from the place which superstition has assigned to the mother of our Lord ! It is thought not enough that she should be blessed among women ; so she is represented as a goddess above all—a protectress to be invoked—a crowned

* Chap. i. 14.

and sceptred queen of heaven to be conciliated in order that she may exert her authority over the Son of God. It is all irreverent and untrue.

The only act in which the company of disciples engaged before Pentecost, was the filling up of the place from which Judas Iscariot fell. As the Church was now about to be founded, it was necessary that there should be twelve apostles, not eleven. "The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."* But the brethren could not appoint an apostle. They did what they could: they chose two names, and of these the Lord unseen indicated by the lot that He appointed Matthias. The brethren did not ordain Matthias. It is simply stated that he "was numbered with the eleven apostles."

After a week of united prayer—glorious precedent for all such concerts of prayer in after times—the day of Pentecost arrived. In the Temple were offered, according to the law, the first fruits of the harvest. In the assembly of the disciples, there was a gathering to God in Christ of the first fruits of redemption. It was the birthday of the Church of God. The Holy Ghost descended; and that not in a faint or tentative manner, but with fulness and power, and with attendant prodigies. Then Simon Peter, to whom it belonged to take the initiative and to open the kingdom of heaven with the key which the Lord had entrusted to him, opened it at Jerusalem, by preaching Christ in death and resurrection to an astonished multitude. After he had opened his mouth on that day, no miracle was wrought. The Church was founded on apostolic testimony, or born of the Spirit with the word of truth. It was a birth auspicious of a great career. The Church started into life with thousands of believers; and daily the Lord added saved ones to the number.

Then signs following. A lame man was healed at one of the gates of the Temple in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth; and Simon Peter took advantage of the impression produced on

* Rev. xxi. 14.

the people to deliver a second public address, preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins to the men of Jerusalem.

The Church now numbered about five thousand, and the Jewish authorities could not see its progress without alarm. They tried to deter the apostles, and to suppress their testimony by force. Judaism was plainly in the wrong, for it had no reply of argument, but only the senseless one of persecution. All the more disgraceful, too, the attempt to concuss the apostles into silence, as coming from the Sadducees, the liberal party in "the Jews' religion." They were offended by the preaching of the resurrection from the dead; and a liberalist or rationalistic party can be quite as bitter as any other, as unfair and tyrannical, when their pet doctrines, or denials of doctrine, are called in question. When Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrim, it was with a very different bearing from that which they showed, but a few weeks before, when their Master was brought as a prisoner into the high priest's palace. Then Peter denied his Lord, and John held his peace. But now Peter and John astonished the council by their boldness.

Discharged with threats, they returned "to their own company;" and there was a joyful burst of thanksgiving to God. But out of the very enthusiasm of the Church its first internal danger sprang. A generous impulse led the disciples to cast their earthly possessions into a common fund. Partakers of a common earthly peril and heavenly hope, they would share everything together. Not that any rule was enacted to that effect, or any condition enforced. It was a temporary communism, entirely voluntary and optional. But, unfortunately, there always are persons who wish to pass for Christians of the highest and most generous type, while yet their hearts are covetous and selfish; and, to gain or support their reputation, they must betake themselves to deceit. Such were Ananias and his wife Sapphira, who pretended to devote all to the common fund, while they reserved a part. A terribly sudden death inflicted on each of them, warned the Church of the guilt and danger of lying to the Holy Ghost.

After this, "believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women;" and, as a consequence, the conflict with the authorities in Jerusalem was renewed. The internal danger being purged away for the time, external danger succeeded. The apostles were arrested; and, though rescued from death by the considerate speech of Gamaliel, a learned Pharisee, they were cruelly beaten for the name of Jesus. But as the winds that rock and scourge the branches make the tree to strike its roots more widely and deeply in the ground, so did these troubles confirm and establish the Church.

The rapid increase of numbers rendered it necessary for the apostles to disengage themselves from the less spiritual employments which had required their attention, such as the superintendence and distribution of the common fund, and to devote their time to the higher functions of testimony and prayer. The "outward business," or "serving of tables," was committed to seven deacons, chosen by the disciples at large, and ordained by the apostles with prayer and imposition of hands. It was the first new wheel introduced into the simple machinery, and introduced only as and when the actual need arose. The names of the seven are Greek, and indicate that they were Grecians or Hellenist Jews. This was fitted, and no doubt designed, to satisfy the Grecians who had murmured against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. As the first deceit in the Church was connected with property, so, also, was the first dissension; for "the love of money is a root of all evil."

One of the deacons has the glory of being the first martyr furnished by the Church. The violent but glorious death of Stephen closes the first division of the Book of Acts. Jerusalem, having crucified the Master, now stoned one of His disciples. Stephen saw the Master in Heaven; committed his spirit to Him; prayed for his murderers,—and then "fell asleep." He lost his life for Christ's sake, and found it. He was faithful unto death, and won that crown of life which his

very name, Stephen, seemed to predict for him. His death suggests to us Bunyan's description of the departure of Mr. Valiant-for-truth across the river to the Celestial City. He made his will, which was this,—“My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought His battles, who will be my rewarder now.” When Mr. Valiant-for-truth went into the river, he said, “Death, where is thy sting?” And as he went down deeper, he said, “Grave, where is thy victory?” “So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.”

The Church at Jerusalem was agitated by this outbreak of violence, but could not be suppressed. Indeed, from the death of Stephen it took a new impulse, and began to spread abroad.

II. The witnessing Church in Judea and Samaria (chaps. viii. ix.)

The apostles remained at their post in Jerusalem; but persecution scattered some of the disciples, and the Spirit of the Lord led them to Samaria.* In the rural parts of Judea, they had only to enlarge the work begun at Jerusalem; but in Samaria they struck new ground. They dealt with a people who were neither Jews nor Gentiles, but were of mixed origin, and occupied an intermediate position.

At the city of Samaria, Philip, a colleague of Stephen, preached with power, and healed many. Tidings of the work having reached Jerusalem, the Apostles Peter and John came down on a special mission. Then Samaria had its own Pentecost; for, after prayer, the Holy Ghost was received, and, under the ministry of Peter, the kingdom of God was opened. At Samaria, too, the Church had its early dangers, from the same source as at Jerusalem—the love of money. There was a certain magician, named Simon, who had received baptism,

* It was the very track followed by the Lord Jesus Himself. See John iii. 22, iv. 4.

but thought that spiritual gifts might be bought with money, and displayed for money. St. Peter sternly rebuked him; and to this day his name is infamous, for we stigmatise the unhallowed purchase of a spiritual position as simony.

The two apostles, returning from the chief city, preached the Gospel in the villages of the Samaritans: and at many places throughout Palestine the work of the Lord began to appear. On the way from Jerusalem to Gaza, the treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia, a heathen by birth, but a Jewish proselyte of the gate, was converted and baptized by Philip. At Lydda and the neighbouring maritime town of Joppa, Simon Peter healed the sick, and even raised the dead. "And many believed on the Lord."

The great event, however, of this period was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. In those days, this young Pharisee was going to and fro like a very dragon, "breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." But the Saviour whom he persecuted in His members met Saul in the way, and changed that eager foe into a loving friend. He called Jesus, Lord; and at Damascus he received the Holy Ghost, and was baptized. Then he preached Christ in the synagogues, exposing himself to the very persecution which he had so recently kindled against the Church. Now men breathed out threatening and slaughter against him. The Jews took counsel to kill him; but the brethren took counsel for his safety, enabled him to escape from Damascus, and, after he had gone to Jerusalem and Cæsarea, sent him to his own city, Tarsus.

So ends this part of the history. "Then the Church throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, had peace, being edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, was multiplied."*

III. The witnessing Church going forth to the ends of the earth (chap. x.-xxviii.)

* Chap. ix. 31.

The interest passes from Jerusalem to Cæsarea, the seat of Gentile government; and we read of what may be called the Gentile Pentecost. It was preceded by prayer. It was signalled by preaching, the preacher being the same as at Jerusalem, and the truth preached substantially the same. Simon Peter bore witness to Jesus Christ in life, death, and resurrection; omitting references to the Old Testament, but adding these statements for the Gentiles—that Jesus “is Lord of all,” and that He is appointed “the Judge of quick and dead.” Again the power came. Peter preached, and God wrought. “The Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word.” They spoke with tongues, and magnified God. Again the apostle Peter found himself in a scene of blessed commotion, for it was a day of the right hand of the Most High. Then, with a wise promptitude, he commanded that those Gentiles should “be baptized in the name of the Lord.”

A memorable day for all nations. It introduced “the times of the Gentiles.” From that hour, to us sinners of the Gentiles are preached the unsearchable riches of Christ. On us is shed forth the gift of the Holy Ghost. “God hath also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”

Cæsarea, however, was no sufficient or suitable centre for Gentile Christianity; and our minds are taken away to Antioch, where the Church was planted by unnamed Hellenist preachers, and then watered by two men of illustrious name—Barnabas, whom the apostles sent down from Jerusalem for the purpose, “for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith”—and Saul, whom Barnabas fetched from Tarsus. At that time, Antioch was a city of beauty, wealth, and Greek culture. Josephus says that it was the third city of the empire. The Church there prospered greatly; and having much intelligence and missionary spirit, made Antioch a sort of Jerusalem for the Gentile world. It was there that the distinction between the Church and the synagogue began to be openly perceived; for the disciples got a new name, no doubt from the heathen who saw that they were something more than Jews;

and they "were called Christians first at Antioch." The name was, in the early ages, covered with opprobrium, and exposed those who bore it to suffering;* but it has long ago become a glorious title on the earth, and we have nothing better to say of any man than that he is a genuine Christian.

The Church at Antioch showed its faith by its works, and sent a loving gift to the brethren in Judea, who were in straits by reason of a "great dearth." Barnabas and Saul carried the gift to Jerusalem, and handed it over to the elders. Of the appointment of these officers we have no account; but St. Luke seems to mention their existence as a matter of course, for elders were appointed over the Church in every city. In congregations, chiefly of Hebrew origin, they were called elders or presbyters; in those of Greek origin, bishops or overseers. Accordingly, St. Peter and St. James, writing to Hebrew Christians, use the word presbyter or elder.† St. Paul, in speaking and writing to Churches of mixed origin, uses both presbyter and episcopos, elder and bishop. That these were at first equivalent terms is frankly conceded by our best commentators and ecclesiastical writers, even of the prelatie school, as by Alford, Ellicott, Hatch, and Lightfoot. The last named, in his excellent dissertation on the Christian Ministry appended to one of his commentaries, not only admits that in the apostolic writings presbyter and bishop are "only different designations of one and the same office," but recognises the existence and action of the primitive presbyteries; and states that "as late as the year A.D. 70 no distinct signs of episcopal government have hitherto appeared in Gentile Christendom." Similar testimonies might be adduced from the great ecclesiastical writers on the Continent down to the present day, including authors as far apart from each other as Dr. Döllinger and Dr. De Pressensé. Whatever argument may be added for prelates or diocesan bishops, it is certain that the Church of the first century, while founded by apostles, exhorted by prophets, and extended by evangelists,

* After this it occurs only twice in the New Testament. (Acts xxvi. 28; 1 Peter iv. 16.)

† 1 Peter v. 1, 2; James v. 14.

had two orders of officers, and only two—presbyter-bishops, and deacons.*

The errand of Barnabas and Saul leads back the history to Jerusalem, and, as it left that city on the martyrdom of Stephen, so it returns to tell of the martyrdom of James, the brother of John. Herod Agrippa I. had crept by flattery to the throne of his uncle, Herod the Great, and sought to keep his seat by pleasing the Jews. Accordingly, he beheaded this prominent apostle, one of the three most intimate companions of Christ. He also imprisoned one more prominent still, Simon Peter; intending to put him to death, as a spectacle to the people, after the feast of the passover. His purpose was foiled by the united and persevering prayers of the Church; for Peter was delivered out of prison by an angel of the Lord. It is one of the finest incidents in this book; and just such an incident as we should expect to find in a history written by St. Luke, for, as we have already noticed in his Gospel, it is characteristic of him to pay special heed to the subject and the use of prayer.

Soon after this, an angel of the Lord came on a different errand, and in an hour when the persecutor Herod was inflated with pride, smote him so that he died of a loathsome disease. There is a grand stroke of contrast in these words—"He was eaten of worms and gave up the ghost; but the word of God grew and multiplied." Since that day, the word has outlived many a proud hater of its doctrine, and many a persecutor of its witnesses. And to-day it is fresh as ever, and as full of vitality. As many as receive and love it are bound up with that conquering Church, which survives all the Herods of the world, inheriting the life everlasting, and the world to come.

A great part of the third division of this book—a full half of its whole contents—is occupied with the missionary work of St. Paul and his companions, and with the sufferings and testimonies of that apostle, as a prisoner for Jesus' sake.

* See Phil. i. 1; 1 Tim. ii.

The missionary journeys are three in number.

1. The expedition of Paul and Barnabas to the island of Cyprus, and the Asiatic provinces of Pamphylia and Pisidia (chaps. xiii. xiv.)

The starting-point was Antioch. The moving and directing power was the Holy Ghost. By Him were chosen for the work two men—the two whom the Church at Antioch would naturally have been most reluctant to spare—Barnabas and Saul. At the time when they were selected, their destination was not revealed; but when they set forth, the divine wisdom of the choice became apparent. Barnabas was a Cypriote; and they were to sail to Cyprus. Saul was of Tarsus in Cilicia; and they were to go into that country, and the regions lying behind. Their individual characteristics, too, formed a happy combination. Barnabas was genial and venerable; Saul fervent and eloquent, and the more disposed to co-operate with his senior, because it was Barnabas who had first introduced him to the confidence of the brethren at Jerusalem, and who had sought his help to teach and foster the Church at Antioch.

So they went forth, sent by the Holy Ghost, and sent by the Church. With John Mark as their attendant, they took ship at Seleucia, the port of Antioch, and, landing in Cyprus, traversed the extent of the island, preaching in the Jewish synagogues. At the town of Paphos, they rebuked and judged a certain sorcerer; and the pro-consul of the island, Sergius Paulus,* believed.

After this, Saul is called Paul, and takes the more prominent part in the work.

From the island the missionaries made for the mainland at Perga in Pamphylia, at which place John Mark left them, returning faint-hearted to Jerusalem. But they proceeded to Antioch in Pisidia, where Paul delivered, in the synagogue, the

* The accuracy of St. Luke is constantly receiving confirmation. The name of this pro-consul has been discovered on an ancient inscription at Soli.

first of all his addresses which is on record. It is remarkable for its clear statement of a doctrine afterwards dilated on in the Epistles, viz., The justification through faith from all things from which men could not be justified by the law of Moses. The Gentile population of the town received the message of the Gospel more readily than the Jews; and the latter, always violent in their intolerance, obtained the expulsion of the missionaries. So they went on to Iconium, where similar results followed; and thence to the cities of Lycaonia, preaching the Gospel with success. A deed of healing at Lystra induced the superstitious natives to take them for gods in human form. And yet after this, the mob, at the instigation of certain Jews, fell on St. Paul, and stoned him, till they supposed he was dead. But God raised him up.

Wisely and courageously, the two missionaries then returned over the same route, and organised the Churches they had founded, ordaining elders in every city, to feed and guard the flock of God. So, by their presence and their word, they confirmed the souls of the disciples. Then they returned to Antioch, and at a great missionary meeting gave in their report. "When they were come, and had gathered the Church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened a door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they tarried no little time with the disciples."

Between the first and second missionary journeys of St. Paul is inserted a most important record—that of the first Church Council, held at Jerusalem for the discussion and decision of the great question of Gentile Christian liberty. It shows us that religious and ecclesiastical problems ought to be judged, not by rulers and parliaments of the kingdoms of this world, but by those who are entrusted with spiritual jurisdiction in the house of God. It shows us, also, that local differences should not be left to produce local dissension and schism, but should be submitted by reference or appeal to the collective wisdom of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

2. The journey of Paul and Silas through Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece (chap. xv. 36—xviii. 22). Now, the history touches classic spots—Troy, Philippi, Athens, and Corinth.

The proposal of Barnabas to take his nephew Mark on the second expedition did not please Paul; and the two friends, after a sharp dispute on the point, parted company. Paul took with him Silas, a prophet from Jerusalem; so that they together represented the apostles and prophets, the two orders of witness fundamental in the Church.

St. Paul's first idea was simply to revisit the Churches which had been planted on his former journey. So he took his way through Asia Minor; and from the dark region of Lycaonia, drew to himself a new companion who became very dear to him—Timothy, his own son in the faith. Overpassing the limits of his first expedition, he came to Troas, or Troy, on the Ægean Sea, where Luke joined the missionary company.

It was at Troas that a mystic summons was given to the apostle to pass over into Europe. In a vision a man of Macedonia stood before him, and said—"Come over and help us!" Construing this vision as an expression of the will of Christ, Paul at once set sail with his companions, made a swift voyage across the narrow sea, and then travelled by land to the city of Philippi.

The apostle's first convert in Europe was Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened. She was one of a group of devout women, who met for prayer by the river side, there being no synagogue in Philippi. No sooner was she baptized and her house, than opposition to the work of God began to appear. It came, as formerly at Paphos, and afterwards at Ephesus, from the heathen demonism. An outcry was raised against the missionaries, and they were unjustly beaten and imprisoned by order of the prætors. But the Lord rewarded them by the conversion of the keeper of the prison, who was saved through faith with all his house, and forthwith was baptized.

Thessalonica was the next town of importance which they

visited. Being a place of commerce, it contained many Jews, and had a synagogue. There, according to his custom, St. Paul delivered his testimony; arguing three points—that the Messiah promised in the Hebrew Scriptures was to be a sufferer—that, having suffered, He was to rise again—and that Jesus fulfilled these conditions, and was the very Christ. His success, however, was small with his own nation; and the Thessalonian Church was formed almost entirely of Gentiles who “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.”* When the Jews stirred up the heathen rabble against Paul and Silas,† they departed, by the advice of their fellow Christians, to the town of Berea. Considerable success attended them there; but tumults again arose, and Paul, being the most obnoxious to the Jews, left the country, his companions, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, remaining for a while in Macedonia.

The apostle knew not whither he went; but a ship was found on the coast bound for the Piræus, and it carried Paul toward the great seats of Gentile knowledge and influence. Athens heard him discoursing of the true God, and of Jesus and the resurrection. He was the greatest teacher that had ever opened his mouth in that city of philosophers; but it knew him not. The wisdom of Athens did not appreciate the wisdom of God. A few believed—among them a judge of the Areopagus,—but as for the curious questioners of Athens, Paul “departed from among them,” and never visited their city again.

Special mention is made of “a woman named Damaris,” converted at Athens. Surely Lydia and her companions at Philippi had prayed for a blessing on their own sex, for at each city visited by the missionaries we read of female converts. At Thessalonica there were “of chief women not a few;” at

* *Thess. i. 9, 10.*

† St. Luke is careful to give the proper designation of magistrates: Politarchs at Thessalonica, Asiarchs at Ephesus. The former of these titles, which does not occur in extant classical authors, has lately been discovered on an arch which once spanned the main street of Thessalonica.

Berea, "of honourable women which were Greeks not a few ;" and at Athens, though only one woman believed, the circumstance is mentioned, and her name is embalmed in the undying record.

St. Paul went on to Corinth, the other great city of what was then called Achaia, or Greece proper. He dwelt there with Aquila, a devout Jew, of whom, and of his wife Priscilla or Prisca, we have many favourable notices. "Being of the same trade," he wrought with them, and earned his own bread. Fine subject for a thoughtful painter—far above Hercules at the distaff—the great-souled apostle sitting among his Christian friends, making tents! Grand patience of the ardent spirit! Paul was fit to direct others, for he knew how to repress himself. He could tell when to advance, for he understood when to rest and be still. Yet he was never idle. While working at his trade, he "prayed always" for the Churches so lately planted in Macedonia, wrote his two letters to the Thessalonians, and discoursed every Sabbath in the Corinthian synagogue.

The Jews, unable to confute him, had recourse to their usual weapons of calumny and violence. They stirred up a tumult, and aimed at his life ; but it happened that Gallio, the brother of Seneca, was pro-consul at the time ; and he, not from any regard for Paul, but from a thorough Roman contempt for the Jews and their questions, drove the accusers of the apostle from his presence.

Soon after, St. Paul rapidly concluded this great missionary expedition. Silas and Timothy had rejoined him at Corinth ; but on his return to Asia, his companions were Aquila and Priscilla. He sailed from the port of Cenchrea to Ephesus, and thence to Cæsarea. Having paid a brief visit to Jerusalem "to salute the Church," he returned to Antioch, his starting point, where he and Silas had been "recommended by the brethren to the grace of God." So ends the second missionary journey, by which the circle of the gospel was greatly widened.

3. A journey through Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece, ending at Jerusalem (chap. xviii. 23—xxi. 17).

St. Paul took his course through Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples in the interior of Asia Minor. While he was thus occupied, another was breaking up the fallow ground at Ephesus. It was Apollos of Alexandria—fervid, diligent, eloquent, mighty in the Scriptures. When he came to Ephesus, he was no more than a disciple of John the Baptist; but he was privately initiated by Aquila and Priscilla into the Christian doctrine and life. It is a pleasing incident. The good tent-maker and his wife did well to discern the promise of usefulness in this new preacher, and, not exposing his defect of knowledge, to teach him privately. And Apollos did well gratefully to accept their kind instruction.

He went over to Corinth, where “Paul planted, and Apollos watered.” While he was there, Paul reached Ephesus, the populous and licentious capital of the province of Asia. His ministry in that city lasted for two years; was marked by great power, and crowned with notable success. He began with twelve disciples, who were in the same position as Apollos had been—a position of approximation to Christianity, being subjects of John’s baptism. Having brought them into the Church, St. Paul made a vigorous effort for the conversion of his countrymen, who were still trusting in Moses and the Law. He spoke boldly in the synagogue, till the opposition became so violent that he thought fit to organise the disciples separately in a school or lecture-hall. He also contended with great power against the prevailing heathenism. Signs and wonders were wrought in the name of Jesus; superstitious arts were exposed, and books of magic openly burnt; a large Church was formed, and set in order under many elders or bishops. But this success led, as usual, to popular tumults, stirred up by designing men. At Ephesus, those who incited the mob were not Jews, but Pagans, jealous for the honour of the goddess Diana, and, still more, for their profitable traffic in silver shrines—the

small models of the temple and idol which it was the fashion to set up in private houses.

St. Paul went on to Troas, and thence passed over into Macedonia and Greece. His stay, however, was brief, for, after three months, he resolved to return to Jerusalem. Luke, who accompanied him with several other friends, describes the interviews of Paul with the bands of disciples, on his way to Jerusalem, as a series of pathetic farewells. At Troas, he continued his parting speech till midnight. At Miletus, when he had spoken to the elders of Ephesus, "he kneeled down and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the word which he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship." The disciples at Tyre, unable to turn him from his purpose, also attended him to the ship with their wives and children: "and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed." The voyage ended at Ptolemais, now St. Jean d'Acre. Paul and his friends made their way thence by land to Cæsarea, where warnings and forebodings were renewed. But the apostle, like his Master, "stedfastly set his face to go up." And so the journey ended. "When we came to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly."

The remainder of the book is occupied with the history and testimonies of St. Paul as a prisoner, chap. xxi. 18—xxviii.

The slightest spark was sufficient to kindle against him the wildest fury of the Jews in their own city, Jerusalem. Accordingly, a false outcry that he had profaned the temple excited a terrific tumult which nearly cost him his life. Well might he say of himself—"As dying, and behold we live." From the clutches of the mob at the gate of the temple he was rescued by the Roman Chiliarch or military tribune, and immediately after, without a tinge of angry passion, made a calm and courageous defence of himself in the hearing of the people. At first they listened to him; but, so soon as he spoke of his mission to the Gentiles, they interrupted him with frantic cries.

On the next day, he was brought before the Sanhedrim, to answer for himself ; and, had it not been for the Roman soldiers, he would have met the fate of Stephen. The trial ended in a scene of furious uproar ; and the apostle was withdrawn into the castle, where his spirit was cheered by a vision of the night, in which the Lord Jesus Christ appeared, and told him that he would "also testify at Rome."

The violence of the Jews, and the discovery of a murderous plot against the life of St. Paul, induced the commander, Claudius Lysias, to send him, under guard, to Cæsarea. There he was arraigned before the governor, Felix, on the accusation of the Jews, and made a straightforward and crushing reply. Nevertheless, he was unjustly detained ; and, at the recall of Felix, had been already for two years a prisoner.

The successor of Felix was Festus, a careless man of the world. He would not concede all that was asked by the Jews, but, wishing to show them some favour, proposed to St. Paul to go up to Jerusalem to be judged. The prisoner, standing on his right of Roman citizenship, at once appealed to Cæsar. He would not buy his liberty, as he might have done from Felix, with a bribe ; but he would avail himself of any protection afforded by the laws of the empire.

A visit of Herod Agrippa II. to salute the new governor gave an opportunity, at this time, for a noble address from the apostle—the last public testimony which he delivered in Palestine. It convinced every one of his innocence. But he must needs go to Cæsar's judgment-seat, and testify for Christ at Rome.

He was placed with other prisoners under the charge of a considerate Roman officer, named Julius, and embarked in a coaster of Adramyttium. Luke and Aristarchus accompanied him as friends. At the port of Myra, they went on board a corn ship of Alexandria, bound for Italy. The voyage proved most unprosperous. After a long and terrible storm, they ran ashore on the coast of Malta ; but, though the vessel was completely broken up, all who were on board came safe to land.

On the island they were kindly treated,* and, after a time, resumed their voyage in another corn ship, which had as a "sign" at her prow, Castor and Pollux, the Dioscuri, *i.e.* the twin brothers, who were regarded as patrons and guardians of the sailors on the Mediterranean Sea. They made Syracuse; then Rhegium; then Puteoli, and there landed. Italian disciples now welcomed the much-trying apostle. He went on to Rome; and as he approached the city, and saw Roman Christians come out to meet him, Paul "thanked God and took courage."

The book ends with a description of the apostle dwelling at Rome in a hired house, under the custody of a soldier—the mildest form of imprisonment. From that "hired house," he wrote some of his chief epistles; and there he "received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."

What a marvellous history! What acts, what sufferings, what testimonies, what successes! What strong points the gospel has seized, and what a sweep it has taken from Jerusalem and Antioch to Rome!

It is enough. Many other things we might wish to know that are not recorded in this book; but it is complete for its own wise ends, and not a fragment. It is (1) a record of the founding of the Church against which the gates of Hades shall not prevail; (2) a history of the mighty acts of the Son of Man who is in heaven, through the witnesses and disciples on earth, guided by His Spirit; and (3) a mine of wholesome doctrine, heavenly comfort, and impressive example for Christians always, to the end of the age.

* Again the title of the chief magistrate is carefully noted. Publius (or Poplius) was the Protos or Primus of the island.

THE EPISTLES.



By oral preaching and teaching the apostles and evangelists gathered men to Jesus Christ, and formed them into churches of the saints. The Epistles supplement the oral testimony, survey the condition of the churches, and, with a view to their education and guidance, descant upon Christian doctrine, discipline, and practice. For this reason it is that all persons of religious culture find so much spiritual food in the Epistles. They were composed for the express purpose of feeding the Church, and impressing sacred truth and duty on the followers of the Lamb.

They are twenty-one in number, and thus more numerous than either the historical or the prophetic books. Of the twenty-one, thirteen are ascribed to St. Paul, one to St. James, two to St. Peter, three to St. John, one to St. Jude, and one (the Epistle to the Hebrews) is anonymous.

In the Vulgate the Epistles of Paul are placed first, and this arrangement has been followed in modern versions. It is also the order of many Greek manuscripts, but not of the oldest, or of the greatest number; for they place what are called the general Epistles after the Book of Acts, and before the letters of Paul.

A point of greater importance is the right ordering of St. Paul's Epistles. We have them placed apparently with some reference to their size and importance, and not at all in the order of time in which they were written. The great doctrinal

Epistle to the Romans stands first. Then come the two ecclesiastical and admonitory letters to the Greeks; then six to churches in Asia Minor and Macedonia; and lastly, four letters to individuals. In this order we shall consider them, as we have already studied the books of the Prophets, though we lose much by not following the natural order of time. That order begins with the 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians, and ends with the 2d Epistle to Timothy, arranging the thirteen Epistles of St. Paul in three classes, as follows, with their probable dates:—

(1.) Those written before the apostle's Roman imprisonment, —six in number—viz.,

- 1st Thessalonians, A.D. 53.
- 2d Thessalonians, A.D. 53.
- 1st Corinthians, A.D. 57.
- 2d Corinthians, A.D. 58.
- Galatians, A.D. 58.
- Romans, A.D. 58.

(2.) Those written during the Roman imprisonment, of which there are four—viz.,

- Philippians, A.D. 62.
- Ephesians, A.D. 63.
- Colossians, A.D. 63.
- Philemon, A.D. 63.

(3.) Those written after the Roman imprisonment, of which there are three, the last being produced during the second imprisonment, and quite at the close of the apostle's life—viz.,

- 1st Timothy, A.D. 65.
- Titus, A.D. 66.
- 2d Timothy, A.D. 67 or 68.

There is no difficulty in understanding why so large a proportion of the Canonical Epistles should have issued from the

Apostle Paul. It was he who most abounded in missionary labours, and was the champion of Christianity, not in little Judea, but in the great world. Many churches he planted, others he visited and taught. Over all of them he kept a loving and watchful eye; and there came upon him, in his riper years, a care of all the churches. It appears, too, that he had a most extensive acquaintance with the Christian workers in the cities of Asia, Greece, and Italy. The range of his correspondence resulted from the width of his influence, and the warmth of his sympathy; and the tone of it, as illustrated in the specimens which remain to us, was one of noble fidelity to truth, with deep and thoughtful affection.

St. Paul was no neophyte, but an experienced Christian teacher when he began to write the Epistles. He is believed to have been converted A.D. 37, and the earliest of his extant letters was not written till A.D. 53, when he had thought much and suffered much as a Christian, having preached the Word for sixteen eventful years. His whole ministry extended over about thirty years, and his Epistles were all composed during the latter half of that ministry, or within the fourteen years preceding his martyrdom.

But have we all his Epistles? It has been strongly maintained that we must have them all, on the ground that all the writings of an Apostle were entitled to the rank of sacred scriptures, and that no scripture has been allowed to be lost. But this is a baseless assumption. All the words and works of our blessed Saviour are not found on record; and if sayings of the Son of God, which might have been preserved, have been allowed to be lost, why should it be supposed that all the written words of His apostolic servants must have been saved from the hazards of time as necessary to the completeness of holy Scripture? Enough of St. Paul's correspondence with Churches and with Christian brethren is preserved for the information and direction of the Catholic Church in all time coming. But in the First Epistle to the Corinthians there is an allusion to a previous letter sent to that Church: and in the

Epistle to the Colossians we read of one sent to Laodicea, which might also be read at Colosse. Possibly the latter of these may be the Epistle to the Ephesians, sent as a circular letter to the congregations in the province of Asia; but the former is surely a lost Epistle. What Calvin has said of it seems to us quite reasonable,—“That Epistle of which he speaks is not at this day extant, nor is there any doubt that many others have been lost: but it is enough that those remain to us which the Lord foresaw to suffice.”* If many of St. Paul’s letters have been lost, we may infer that letters of the other apostles are also lost. In course of their ministry they must have had occasion to write many epistles besides those which kind Providence has preserved for our learning, and which the whole Church receives as canonical and inspired.

Before we enter on a detailed examination of the Epistles, let us say something on their general characteristics, and on the relations in which they stand to the written Gospels.

I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS.—Considered in whole, the Epistles are—

1. *Didactic, without the stiffness of dissertation.*—They inculcate the doctrines of our faith in their full development, yet not in the form of dogma, or with elaboration of reasoning and exposition. They have argumentative passages, and statements of truth evidently compacted with care; but their tenor is epistolary, and they teach with the easy grace and quick transitions which are proper to that style.*

2. *Comprehensive without the formality of system.*—Very wide, indeed, is the range of the Epistles. They deal with the

* “Ista epistola, de qua loquitur, hodie don exstat. Nec dubium, quin multae aliae exciderint: sed satis est, quod nobis supersunt quas sufficere Dominus providit.”—Comm. in 1 Cor.

† On the adaptation of the epistolary form of composition to the individual genius and disposition of St. Paul, see Farrar’s *Messages of the Books*, pp. 148–150.

character of God, the person and work of Christ, the salvation by grace, the origin, course, and conflict of spiritual life, the blessings of justification, adoption and sanctification, the place and use of the law, the promise of the inheritance, and the hope of glory. They treat of the nature, calling, and constitution of the Church, the discipline essential to its prosperity, the duties of its officers and members; they also describe the obligations of Christian men in the family and in society, and touch on some of the most minute questions of conduct and intercourse. Throughout all this teaching there runs a perfect intrinsic consistency, without the trammels of thought and phraseology in which our systematic writers are bound. In itself system is good, and it is possible to extract from the Apostolic Scriptures a systematic and formulated theology; but we cannot be too thankful that the sacred writings, and especially the Epistles, were not composed in that method, but have a play of thought and feeling, a variety and elasticity, which invite and interest readers of every intellectual grade.

3. *Authoritative, without dictatorial hardness.*—In every Epistle there is a very explicit claim of right to admonish, and even command, to correct, reprove, and set in order. Although St. Paul was sensitively unwilling to press his authority, he always set forth that he was an Apostle of the Lord, and as such, had power to speak and write what every Church was bound to hear, receive, and obey. St. James used the language of direction as well as exhortation, and spared not reproof and threatening. St. Peter took a milder tone, simply exhorting as an elder: and St. Jude, though dealing with evils and errors in trenchant terms, did not press his own authority; but St. John laid great stress on the truth of his record, and would not permit in any quarter opposition to his apostolic precepts.

This tone of firmness was needful in the first age of the Church, when there were so many questions to be settled, so many errors to be shunned. Still the books of the Apostles were letters, not decrees; and their directions and commands

were accompanied by affectionate persuasions and appeals. They wrote not—"I command you, my people"—but, "I beseech you, my beloved brethren." With all his masculine vigour St. Paul had a wonderful persuasive tenderness. St. Peter wrote with a beautiful humility. St. John often used the address of kindness—"Beloved," and wrote as a father to his "little children." It is this combination of authority with gentleness, after the manner of Christ Himself, which charms us in the Epistles, and makes them so effectual for the inculcation of truth at once on the understanding and on the heart.

II. THE RELATIONS WHICH THE EPISTLES BEAR TO THE GOSPELS.—The oral Gospel is of course pre-supposed and proceeded on. Apostles preached before they wrote. They preached to make men Christians; they wrote to instruct the Christians more fully what to believe, and how to live and walk as became saints. In the Epistles, the facts of the Gospel are not formally and consecutively stated, except once (1 Cor. xv. 1-8); but they are constantly adverted to, and everything is based upon them. All truths centred in, and all comforts and commands emanated from, the Christ of the Gospel, who had been put to death but was alive for evermore.

But what of the relations which the Epistles bear to the written Gospels?

1. It may strike a reader as surprising that the Epistles do not quote from the Gospels, or once mention any of those miracles of Christ, which are so fully narrated by the evangelists. The explanation is that the Epistles preceded the Gospels in time, though the latter precede them in canonical order. It is just possible that the Gospel of St. Matthew may have been produced before St. Paul began to write to the Churches; but those of St. Mark and St. Luke were undoubtedly of a later date than almost all of his Epistles; and the fourth Gospel was not written till Paul, Peter, James and

Jude had all finished their course. There are in St. Paul's letters a few sayings which appear to be quotations of the words of Jesus,* but the Apostle may have had these sayings of the Lord directly from his companion Luke, even before the third Gospel was written. The Epistles then rested, not on the four Gospels as written documents, but on the person and character, words and life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as these were known to the Churches at the beginning through preaching, and through those narratives alluded to by St. Luke in the preface to his Gospel as already in circulation among the brethren—fragmentary narratives long ago superseded by the canonical records of the four evangelists.

2. The Epistles contain doctrine more advanced and developed than the Gospels. On this account it is sometimes charged against us, that we are disciples of Paul of Tarsus, rather than of Jesus of Nazareth, and that all our theological views of atonement, justification, righteousness, election, and the like, are only Pauline conceptions which we have improperly placed above the simpler and wider teachings of the Saviour. Now, it is not difficult to show that all the theological conceptions referred to, are expressed or implied in the Gospels, and have the sanction of the Divine Master. But we avow without hesitation, that they are more fully taught in the Epistles, and for a very good reason. The words of Jesus Christ were spoken to Jews and Galileans, not yet persuaded of His Messiahship, or to those who had just been persuaded, and had become disciples. To them He revealed as much as they were able to hear with profit, and turn to good account. He told them of the Father, the way of access to Him, and the spirituality essential to an entrance into the kingdom of heaven. So teaching, he used words and similitudes, rich in meanings and inferences which were not on the surface obvious to all His

* Compare 1 Cor. ix. 14 ; 1 Tim. v. 18, with Luke x. 4, 7.

„ 1 Thess. v. 2.

„ 1 Tim. iv. 8.

„ Luke xii. 39 ; Matt. xxiv. 43.

„ Luke xviii. 29, 30.

hearers. Indeed, the full import was not then plain to any hearer, for the Holy Ghost was not yet given. But the Epistles contain the teaching of men enlightened by the Holy Ghost after the ascension of the Son of Man, and are, in the strictest sense, the Scriptures of our dispensation. Accordingly, they go further into Christian doctrine and guidance, being adapted to a period when the Spirit of truth is come to guide us into all the truth.

3. The Epistles resemble the Gospels in their combination of intrinsic unity with extrinsic diversity. As Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all set before us the same Jesus Christ, so do Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude all teach one salvation, one calling, one Comforter, one life, one Church, one hope of the Lord's appearing, one fellowship in faith and love. But as the evangelists diversify their narratives, each one writing according to his own bent of mind, and his own special information, and with adaptation to the persons for or to whom in the first instance he wrote; so do the apostles write variously, in accordance with their intellectual individuality, and with due reference to the state of the churches, or the circumstances of the persons whom they address. This will appear as we consider their Epistles in detail; but we may here observe that there is a special sympathy between individual evangelists and individual apostles. Thus,—James accords with Matthew; Peter, who is followed by Jude, accords with Mark; Paul, with Luke; and John, with himself.

Dr. James Hamilton has said that "the Epistles, rich in devotion, laden with the finest of the wheat, are the fruitful fields which fill the Church's granary." Let us go out into those fields, and pluck the ears of corn. And may the Holy Spirit, now in dispensation, guide us step by step, as we move through these rich enclosures of His own teaching in the holy apostles, till we reach at the end of them all the last book of Scripture, unique and sublime, and see the heavens opened, and the glory of the Lord unveiled!

ROMANS.

FOR years before St. Paul saw the city of Rome, he was impressed with the importance of planting Christianity firmly in that capital of the world. He therefore cherished a strong desire to visit the imperial city, and kept himself informed of the condition of the brethren who dwelt there. In time of war, a good general knows well the importance of seizing commanding positions, and discerns them by a sort of intuition. St. Paul had this faculty, as a leader of that little army which, with spiritual weapons of warfare, went forth to subdue the nations to Christ; and, while journeying in the East, he kept this steadily in view: "I must also see Rome."

This great Apostle, however, did not war after the flesh, or push his way hither and thither according to his own will. Most humbly and patiently he waited the order of Providence, and followed the indications of duty given to him by his Lord and Master in the Spirit. Thus his visit to Rome was delayed for years; and when it did occur, it was not that of a missionary going at pleasure, but that of a prisoner appealing to the emperor for his liberty. During the period of delay, it happily occurred to St. Paul to write a letter to the brethren at Rome; and he marked his sense of the importance of instructing and encouraging the Christians at the metropolis by composing for them an epistle more full and elaborate than he sent to any of the other Churches, even to those that he most deeply loved.

It appears to have been written at Corinth, during the Apostle's second residence in that city, and was transmitted under the care of Phœbe, a deaconess of the Church at Cenchrea, which

was a small seaport on the Saronic Gulf. Never did woman carry a more precious document.

The authenticity of the letter is admitted even by the sceptical critics; and we need hardly say that its contents are of immense value to Christian theology. Divines have given to it the most anxious and arduous study. Luther wrote of it with enthusiasm as a book "which every Christian man should know by heart—word for word, and feed upon as the daily bread of his soul." Calvin, whose Commentary on this Epistle has been justly called "a masterpiece," said that "whosoever obtains a true understanding of this Epistle has an open door to reach the most hidden treasures of Scripture." We might add many more eulogistic testimonies; but, in fact, every one who has studied the firm texture of its thought and the intense force of its arguments and appeals, will speak with admiration and reverence of the Epistle to the Romans.

It is quite unknown by whom the Gospel of Christ was first conveyed to Rome. Not by any of the apostles, but probably by those "strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes," who were at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and heard the testimony of St. Peter. At the time when St. Paul wrote, there were many Christian labourers in the great city—men and women, well known to the Apostle, and beloved for the truth's sake, and for their work's sake. They do not seem to have been as yet organised in one *ecclesia*. They are not so addressed, nor is there any mention of their bishops and deacons. Probably the severity with which the Jews at Rome had been treated by the Emperor Claudius led the Christians to avoid visible organisation for a season. So we read in the last chapter of the Epistle of churches, or groups, in various private houses.* Salutations are sent to these, and they are directed to salute one another, avoiding divisions and offences. This state of matters appears to have continued till the Apostle's arrival at Rome, three years after his letter. Even then there is no mention of "the Church," nor were they bishops of Rome who met St. Paul at Appii

* Chap. xvi. 4, 5, 10, 11, 14, 15.

Forum, as the bishops of Ephesus had previously gathered to him at Miletus. There were brethren, accustomed to meet for worship in household companies, but there was no compacted and influential Church.

These brethren were by no means all, or even chiefly, natives of Italy. They were Hellenist Jews, whose minds had been opened by travel, commerce, and knowledge of the world, with whom were associated some of the Gentiles who had been proselytes to the Jews' religion, and so had a measure of preparation for the faith and fellowship of Christ. Indeed, for two centuries the Hellenism continued. Latin Christianity was born in Africa, not in Italy; and its first eminent writer was Tertullian. What sprung up in Rome was a Jewish-Greek Church, having its scriptures, prayers, and hymns in Greek.*

St. Paul was peculiarly fitted, by his culture and experience, to deal with such a community. And we cannot sufficiently wonder at the perversity which associates the Church of Rome with the name of St. Peter, who cannot be proved to have ever entered the city, and whose alleged episcopate or popedom of nearly a quarter of a century can easily be disproved, instead of with that of St. Paul, who wrote to and visited the brethren there before the Church was organised, exercised a powerful ministry there during his long detention as a prisoner, and certainly finished his course by martyrdom at Rome.†

What we have said of the first Christians at Rome, as either Hellenist Jews, or Gentile Proselytes, helps to explain the tenor of the Epistle, which addresses both Jews and Gentiles, but assumes in all an acquaintance with those Scriptures of the Old Testament which the Jews and Proselytes alike revered.

The Epistle consists of three parts:—

* See *Milman's History of Latin Christianity*, book i., chap. i.

† "It is not without significance that, among the frescoes of the Catacombs, the only figure of an apostle which is represented separately from the rest of the twelve is that of St. Paul, described as PAVLVS PASTOR APOSTOLVS, side by side with a figure of the Good Shepherd. In none of the Catacombs is St. Peter specially designated by name or attribute." —*Marriott's Testimony of the Catacombs*, p. 74.

I. *An argumentative exposition of the Salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.*—This is considered the doctrinal division, and occupies eight chapters.

After the introduction, which is characteristically courteous and impressive, St. Paul expresses his readiness to preach the Gospel at Rome; and immediately declares what to him was the great value of that Gospel—its Divine power to save mankind—the Jew first indeed, but also the Greek. The Gospel revealed the righteousness of God. Man needed this Gospel because of his own unrighteousness by which the wrath of God was incurred. The charge of unrighteousness the Apostle brings first against the Gentiles, describing in unsparing terms their departure from God and shocking degradation of life; and then against the Jews, as transgressors of the law in which they boasted, and as circumcised in the flesh only, and not in the heart. The conclusion is, that Jews and Gentiles were “all under sin.”

Throughout the discussion, constant reference is made to law and justice: and this is characteristic of the Epistle. When St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he gave prominence to wisdom, for the Greeks sought after wisdom. But Rome was the city of imperial law, and the great seat of jurisprudence and government. It was therefore fitting that to Jews and Gentiles residing there, should be addressed this demonstration of the position of mankind, as transgressors condemned by Divine law and justice, and unable by deeds to justify themselves. The world centred at ancient Rome: and in a letter sent to Rome was the whole world proved and pronounced to have “been guilty before God.”

This representation of all mankind as under sin and condemnation, determines the view of salvation in Christ which predominates in the Epistle to the Romans. The question which presses is that of justification; and no one can interpret the Epistle who does not keep this before his mind. How was the law of God to be established, the justice of God maintained, and at the same time the guilty sinner justified in His sight?

The Gospel answers the question; because in it the righteous-

ness of God is revealed in saving sinners by faith in Jesus Christ, without the deeds of the law. This is taught in the end of the third chapter. Then the fourth shows that justification by faith was a blessing conferred on Abraham, and implied in the Psalms of David. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him unto righteousness." We too are accepted, if we believe in God who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead. We have the blessedness which David describes as pertaining to the man "unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works." God is righteous in so justifying us; and we, being accepted as righteous through faith, have peace with Him, and, standing in His grace, rejoice in the hope of His glory.

Having thus shown the position of those who embrace the Gospel, the Apostle goes on to compare and contrast the fall of the many into condemnation through one man disobedient, with the admission of many into justification through one Man obedient. The leading thought is still the judicial, not the moral,—“As by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men to justification of life.”*

Anticipating the objection that a gratuitous justification would operate to the detriment of holiness, and encourage self-indulgence, St. Paul expresses his abhorrence of such a misuse of the doctrine, and proceeds to expound the nature of union to Christ, as securing victory over sin, along with immunity from condemnation. He shows that believers are bound up with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection; and that this union, delivering them alike from legal terror and from legal hope, induces new and loving obedience. They become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that, in union or marriage to Him as their risen Lord and life, they may live and bear fruit unto God. So the apostle establishes that sanctification as well as justification is by the grace of God only, not through bondage to the law, but through union to Christ in liberty. Then, in the sublime and animated strain of the eighth chapter, he

* Chapter v. 18.

expatiates on the safety of those who are in Christ, the indwelling and witness of the Spirit of adoption, the hope of glorious resurrection, the security of salvation in the purpose and calling of God, the reality of His act of justification, and the immutability of His love in Jesus Christ our Lord.

So ends the first part of the Epistle. Its key-words are those formed from *δικη*—right, righteousness, righteous judgment, just, justify, justification. Whosoever holds fast the proper meaning of these terms may find his way through the whole discussion: but whosoever confounds the judicial and the moral, can never do so, for he fails to see the problem with which the Apostle deals, and therefore must fail to grasp the cardinal truth of salvation which the Apostle inculcates, viz., that while the law of God condemns, God freely justifies us through faith in Christ the propitiation for our sins, and in union with Him as our crucified and buried, but now risen Saviour.

II. *A statement of the rejection of Israel, and calling of the Gentiles*—This theme occupies the 9th, 10th, and 11th chapters.

Many of the Jews at Rome refused the Gospel. We find them, at the time of St. Paul's arrival, disowning the Christians, as "a sect everywhere spoken against." The Apostle therefore proceeds to account for the unbelief of his own nation. To him who loved them with all the affection of his nature it was intensely mortifying to see that the Stone of Salvation was, to the great majority of the Jews, a stumbling-stone and a rock of offence. Yet this did not perplex him, for he was a student of the Old Testament, and found the defection of the Jews and the calling of the Gentiles foretold by the prophets Hosea and Isaiah. It was also clear to him that the time had arrived for a change in the dispensation of Divine mercy, in accordance with a Divine sovereign purpose which might not be disputed or gainsaid. Only a remnant of Israel remained true to God by believing in Christ; and this was "according to the election of grace." His salvation, indeed, was free to the Jew as to the

Gentile,* but then it was free to the Gentile as to the Jew ; and the offence thereby given to the Jews led to their rejection of the Gospel and their estrangement from God. During this estrangement they were to go on as before reading Moses, and boasting in the law ; but they were unconsciously to change places with the Gentiles in relation to God. Those that had been near to Him were to be put far off, and those who had been far off were to be made nigh.

This, however, is not the final doom of Israel. It is the sentence upon them for a season or dispensation. "Hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in ; and so all Israel shall be saved." The prophetic eye is given to the Apostle, so that he sees a happy issue for both Jews and Gentiles. "God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that He might have mercy upon all."

Then, as the first part of the Epistle ends with enraptured persuasion of the love of God, so ends the second part with admiration of His wisdom and knowledge : "for of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things ; to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

III. *Practical counsels and salutations.*—These are contained in the 12th and following chapters.

By the mercies of God, which they have tasted, the Christians are besought to live in devotion to Christ and in love one toward another. Diligence, brotherly kindness, humility, prayerfulness, and sympathy are affectionately commended to the brethren. Then they are instructed as to obedience to civil rulers, and the obligation to pay tribute for conscience' sake. Christ Himself had been accused of disloyalty to Cæsar, and it was a frequent charge against the early Christians that they cherished a treasonable spirit, and incited to tumults. It is an allegation which has been made with equal falsehood against earnest evangelical Christians in times much more recent. St. Paul could not but know that an intelligent

* Chap. x. 11-13.

Christianity must tend to promote human freedom, and shake the thrones of injustice and tyranny. But it was not for the Christians to evade the payment of taxes, or show disrespect to the government under which they lived. Though it were a heathen Cæsar who reigned, the command of Christ was clear to give to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and to God the things that are God's.

The duty of brotherly kindness is then enforced with reference to a controversy which had sprung out of the greater question of the union of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. Some had scruples about eating flesh, lest they should partake of that of animals which had been slain in heathen sacrifice. Others made light of such scruples, as well as of the importance which was attached to the religious observance of particular days. The Apostle holds the scrupulous brethren to be weak, but urges on all parties to have mutual patience, respect one another's conscientious views, and let each one live to the Lord according to his own light or sense of duty. It would well become the strong to waive their liberty rather than cause the weak brethren to stumble. "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Then follows those words of loving wisdom, "Let us therefore follow after the things of peace and the things of mutual edification." "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus; that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received you, to the glory of God."

From the fourteenth verse of the fifteenth chapter to the end, the Epistle* is in a more easy and familiar strain, and

* Critics have suggested that the several breaks near the end of the Epistle are due to its having been sent to more than one Church with a separate conclusion for each. They also remark on the singularity of so many personal greetings being addressed to a community which the Apostle had not yet visited, and suppose that these were really sent to

tells of the Apostle's labour in the Gospel—his desire to go to Rome, his hope to do so on his way to Spain, and his intention to go to Jerusalem, bearing the contribution of the foreign churches to the poor saints in Judea. After this we have the commendation of Phœbe, the bearer of this Epistle, and greetings to many of the saints, beginning with the good tentmaker Aquila and his wife Prisca, who played so useful a part at Corinth as well as at Rome;—"Unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the Churches of the Gentiles." Let every reader of the sixteenth chapter mark well,—(1.) That the saints then known at Rome were living men and women, to whom messages could be sent, not departed personages, canonised by authority, and appealed to in prayers; (2.) That no priests, monks, or nuns are mentioned, but family life is alluded to more than once as that which became saints; (3.) That there is no allusion to St. Peter or a Holy See, or to any obligation lying on the Christians in Italy, or elsewhere, to have and obey a Pope. Meyer remarks that this Epistle is "destructive of the historical basis of the Papacy, in so far as this is made to rest on the founding of the Roman Church, and the exercise of its episcopate, by the Apostle Peter."*

After commendation to the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (chap. xvi. 20), there are salutations from the Christian friends who were with St. Paul, and from Gaius his host. Tertius, who has acted as scribe, takes his opportunity to testify that he is no mere instrument of writing, and that his heart also goes forth in affectionate greeting to the brethren at Rome. Then a second benediction,—“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”

One cannot but think that as Tertius laid down the reed which he had used, the Apostle took it into his own hand, and added the sublime sentence of doxology, with which the Epistle

Ephesus, not to Rome. This, however, is pure conjecture. It finds favour with some sober-minded scholars, *e.g.*, Professor Lumbly (*Introd. to N. T.* pp. 222–225). But see Meyer's note in his able Commentary.

* Introduction to Comment., sec. 2.

ends. God was able to establish the brethren according to St. Paul's Gospel, which was something more than "the gospel of the kingdom," for it was a proclamation of the unseen Christ as the Saviour of the world. And, as in the Gospel which St. Paul preached, and this wonderful Epistle which he has written, the Divine wisdom is brightly displayed, the doxology is in these words:—"To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen."

The Epistle to the Romans begins with the power of God, then declares His righteousness, and closes with adoration of His wisdom. It is so with the heart that receives the great truths with which this Epistle deals. It begins its new experience under the power of God who raised up Jesus Christ. It finds peace through the declaration of His righteousness. And then it rests in admiration and adoration of His wisdom in planning, providing, and applying the salvation of the world through Christ Jesus.

I. CORINTHIANS.

THE old Corinth of Greek history was destroyed by a Roman general in the year B.C. 146. The city called by that name in the New Testament was a new Corinth, founded by Julius Cæsar, about 100 years before the Gospel was brought to it by the Apostle Paul. In his time it was a flourishing city, the capital of Achaia, and had quite outstripped in importance its old rival, the city of Athens. The Roman pro-consul of Greece resided at Corinth, and there was a large population of Romans and Jews, as well as native Greeks.

St. Paul's first missionary visit to the Corinthians extended over a year and a half, during which period he lived with Aquila and Priscilla, and wrought with his own hands to earn his daily bread. At the outset he preached, as his custom was, to the Jews; but rejected by them, he instituted the Church, apart from the synagogue, and ministered as the Apostle of the Gentiles. Some men of mark, as Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, and Titus Justus, a proselyte, were converted and baptized; but the Corinthian Church was mainly a Gentile one, and the questions there discussed were not Jewish, did not turn on the value of circumcision or the obligation of the law, but were such as concerned a people just converted from idolatry, and emerging from the corruption of heathen life in a city of Greece.

St. Paul stayed for even a longer period at Ephesus, where he laboured ardently for three years. Between the capital of Greece and that of Asia Minor there was constant communication, and the Apostle was kept informed of the progress of the

Corinthian Church which he had planted, and which, after him, the eloquent Alexandrian Jew, Apollos, had "watered" or fostered. It would seem from a statement in his second Epistle,* that he himself paid a brief second visit to Corinth, which is not mentioned in the Book of Acts. It is certain that in his anxiety to preserve that Church from error, he sent over his assistant Timothy, who had been with him on his first visit, to call his teaching to remembrance and revive his influence, before he should himself return to the city. "For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every Church. Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you; but I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will." †

There are traces too of correspondence. Aware of the lax tone of morals which prevailed in Corinth, and of the necessity of strictly guarding the purity of the Church, the Apostle wrote a letter to the Christians there "not to have fellowship with fornicators." This seems to have drawn in reply a letter of inquiry, which was intrusted to the hands of Fortunatus, Achaicus, and Stephanas‡, in which various questions were submitted for the Apostle's determination. His answer to this Corinthian letter occupies a large portion of the canonical Epistle before us.

This is the most varied and comprehensive of all the weighty letters of Paul, and exhibits throughout his fine tact and practical wisdom. It is less theological than the Epistle to the Romans; more casuistical in the good sense of that term. It says nothing of the law or of justification, discusses no doctrine whatever save that of the resurrection, but treats in a masterly manner of love, purity, conscience, discernment, and reverence in the Church of God.

The general arrangement of the Epistle is obvious enough.§

* 2 Cor. xiii. 1.

† Chap. iv. 17-21.

‡ Chap. xvi. 17.

§ See the plan of this Epistle in the Commentary of the late Dean of Westminster, p. 23.

After the salutation and introduction, we have three great divisions, followed by admonitions and salutations at the close.

The letter begins in St. Paul's best manner with courteous, generous, and pious words. The Corinthian Christians are saluted according to their holy calling, and thanks are given for the grace of God bestowed on them by Jesus Christ and their rich endowment of spiritual gifts while waiting for their Lord's coming. Before a word is uttered on the faults of the Corinthians, it is beautifully said, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Then begins the body of the Epistle.

I. *Remonstrance with the Corinthians on two matters which had been reported to St. Paul* (chaps. i. 10-vi.).

1. Their contentions (chaps. i. 10-iv.).

It distressed the Apostle to hear of schisms or factions within the Corinthian Church, raising, as rival watchwords, the names of missionaries and teachers. The friends of Gentile liberty cried "Paul;" the admirers of eloquence no doubt cried "Apollos;" those of the circumcision cried "Kephas;" and others, probably priding themselves on their independence of all human teachers, said, with an exclusive spirit which has often uttered the same boast in our own times, "And I of Christ."

For himself St. Paul earnestly disclaims all desire to be the head of a party. He had been so cautious as to avoid baptizing Corinthians with his own hands, lest he should be accused of baptizing into his own name. He had preached the Gospel, for to this end Christ had sent him forth. Recalling this, he expatiates on the simplicity and efficacy of the Gospel, and declares his resolution to know nothing among the inquisitive and disputatious Greeks but "Jesus Christ—Him crucified." This topic might be stigmatised as foolishness, but in his conviction it contained the manifold wisdom of God, and it would approve itself as such to all who were enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

As to Apollos, who had followed Paul in evangelical labours at Corinth, the Apostle is in no wise jealous of him, and does not for a moment suspect him of fostering the spirit of faction. This is quite evident from his desiring his "brother Apollos" to return to that city.* But he presses on the Corinthians to remember that both Apollos and he were not masters, but servants, by whom they believed; that they were builders, but the building was not their house; it was God's temple. The Church was not for the ministry, but the ministry for the Church, and the Church for the Lord.

2. Their laxity in Church discipline (chaps. v. vi.).

The corruption of morals which was common in the heathen society of Corinth, invaded the Church. It is a danger which always besets young Churches planted among dissolute populations. They are very liable to have their members seduced into fleshly sins which prevail around them, and are not reprobated by public social opinion. A very gross case had occurred at Corinth. A member of the congregation had incestuously married his step-mother, and was in this the more inexcusable, inasmuch as this was a wickedness which even the heathens abhorred. The Church should have cleared itself of the evil by expulsion of the offender; and now St. Paul, in the exercise of his apostolic authority, sentences the guilty man to excommunication, and appears even to go further, and to intimate some Divine infliction of bodily suffering, a destruction of the flesh, with a view to the correction and ultimate salvation of the sinner.

The admonition to the Christians to put away from among them that "wicked person," leads the Apostle to dwell for a little on the subject of judgment. The Church was to have its own court of discipline; and it was a shame for the Christians to carry their disputes before the heathen magistrates. Of course this does not mean the abolition of lawyers and magistrates, or the denial of a right of appeal to courts of public justice in a Christianised state of society. It rather applies to

* See chap. xvi. 12.

such a case as that of two Christian converts at the present day in China, taking a dispute before the mandarin, and exposing the Christian name to discredit, instead of settling the matter before or within the Church.* The lesson, however, as against litigiousness is good for every place and all time. The argument also is clear for a court of discipline and a power of self-purification in every Christian assembly. It is a shame that the internal administration of the Church of God should be brought before magistrates, or submitted to courts of civil and earthly jurisdiction.

Resuming the subject of fleshly sins, the Apostle warns the Corinthians not to abuse the doctrine of liberty, and points out the heinousness of all violations of the seventh commandment as inconsistent with true union to Christ, and the consecration of the body to God, who dwells in His people by the Holy Ghost.

II. *Replies to the questions of the Corinthians* (chaps. vii.-xiv.).

The queries put to St. Paul, concerned three matters of urgent practical importance:—and though the circumstances of our churches are very different, the principles laid down by the Apostle in reply, are still of the utmost value to the constitution of Christian society.

1. Of marriage (chap. vii.).—The nuptial state had always been highly honoured among the Jews, but the Greeks at this period, often disparaged it, in order the more freely to gratify vicious inclination. Thus the question of its advantage was yet unsettled in the minds of the Corinthian Christians. They had written to St. Paul about it; and he treats the topic at some length, and with special reference to their circumstances. In other Epistles, he refers to marriage, in terms of entire cordiality and respect; but, as the Corinthians had known it, matrimony was little better than a shelter from incontinence, and St. Paul discusses it mainly in that view, declaring

* See Matt. xviii. 15-17.

marriage to be good, and lawful, but rather giving the higher praise to celibacy, which was his own condition. This, however, was not for all persons and times; it was for the impending crisis,* the days of trouble which were at hand, and in which a Christian witness or martyr would find it an advantage to have few earthly ties. In this matter, the Apostle is careful to explain that he gives his own judgment, and nothing more, for concerning this the Lord Christ had not left any command.

2. Of the feasts of idolaters (chaps. viii.—x.).

This question seems remote from us, but it presented a very serious difficulty in the first century, and caused great difference of opinion in the Church. The meat, or animal food, used at public and private feasts, was largely or wholly furnished from sacrifices offered to the gods. Was it possible for Christians to partake of such feasts with their friends and neighbours, without indirectly involving themselves in the guilt of idolatry? The scrupulous party, including, doubtless, the Jewish Christians, said "No." Others, who may be regarded as the liberal party, maintained that, since the idols were nothing, the meat might be eaten without any question of conscience being fairly raised. St. Paul himself takes the liberal view, but charges those with whom he agreed to remember in such matters, how much is due to brotherly love, to respect scruples which they did not share, and not to exercise their liberty at the cost of wounding the consciences of their brethren. For his own part, he will abstain from meat, utterly, and for ever, rather than make his brother stumble. He enforces these counsels by a fearless reference to the self-abnegation which he had practised during his own residence at Corinth. Let the members of the Church follow him, who had not sought his own profit, but followed Christ, "Who pleased not Himself." The whole passage beautifully combines the Christian exemption from petty scruples with the Christian regard, and tender consideration, for all brethren in the Lord.

3. Of worship in the assembly of God (chaps. xi.—xiv.).

* Chap. vii. 26-28.

The Corinthians appear to have claimed the Apostle's approval for their fidelity to his directions, and he gives them a general commendation, but marks some grave exceptions.

It had displeased him to hear that Christian women appeared in the assembly, and even prayed and prophesied without that covering on the head, which was usual in the country, and the absence of which gave them an air of undue boldness. What we are to extract from this, as a lesson for all times and countries, is, that Christian women everywhere, but especially in the assembly of worshippers, should avoid display, and express in costume and demeanour, modesty and sobriety of taste.

It had displeased him to hear that the Lord's Supper, the precious feast of unity and love, had been profaned by party spirit, and even by greediness and excess. Uniting it to an evening meal, the Corinthians irreverently forgot the distinction between their own supper and the Supper of the Lord. To correct this, St. Paul solemnly rehearses the manner and words of the Holy Supper as received by him from the Lord, and formerly delivered to them by his own lips. He warns them to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink of the cup in memory of Christ crucified. To eat and drink otherwise would be to incur judgment from the Lord. This caution has often been misinterpreted and misused, so as to appal ill-instructed and timorous minds; but it is really levelled against irreverence, and the want of brotherly kindness and spiritual discernment.

It had displeased him to hear that in the Corinthian assembly there was much rivalry and ostentation as regards spiritual gifts, and that the power of speaking "in a tongue" was more esteemed than that of prophesying.—This leads the Apostle to teach the unity of the Church as a many-membered body having diverse functions and gifts, each limb and organ having need of every other, and all pervaded by one spirit of life: then to expatiate, in one of his most celebrated and admired passages, on the excellence of love; and thereupon to urge that the gift most useful

to the Church should be held in highest honour. "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in a tongue edifieth himself, but he that prophesieth edifieth the Church."

Of form and ritual in the Church service we read nothing; but two ruling principles are laid down—(1.) Everything was to be so done that the Church might "receive edifying." (2.) All things should be "done decently and in order"—without tumult or confusion.

III. *Refutation of those at Corinth who denied the resurrection* (chap. xv.).

Those who heard St. Paul at Athens mocked at the resurrection of the dead; and no doubt this doctrine seemed quite as absurd and incredible to the Greek inhabitants of Corinth. Some of these, even when converted to Christ and acknowledging His resurrection, would not credit a resurrection of His disciples. "How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

The Apostle repeats his Gospel in which the resurrection of Christ occupied a cardinal place. Then he dilates on the certainty of the resurrection of the just as secured by the resurrection of their Lord and His power over death. He gives some most important hints on the nature of those bodies in which the saints shall rise; and then concludes with a sublime challenge to death and the grave, and the anticipation of their condign defeat at the coming of Christ and the resurrection of all that are His.

Of the resurrection of the unjust, St. Paul writes nothing in this Epistle, because it had not been brought before him in reports or letters from Corinth, and a statement of it was not necessary for his purpose.

The Epistle closes with admonitions and salutations. If the Corinthians would enjoy a blessed resurrection, they should be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the

Lord." Then, as to a certain good work in which the Apostle was much interested, the contribution for the poor saints in Palestine, he exhorts them to store up money for this purpose on every Lord's day. It was a system which he had already established in the churches of Galatia. Those who have made trial of it in our own times believe it to be the best system for every family and every church.

Kind messages and greetings follow : and St. Paul, taking the pen from his amanuensis (who was, probably, "Sosthenes the brother"), writes his salutation with his own hand.* The last words are,—“ My love be with you all in Christ Jesus.”

Such is this great Epistle, which steers its way through many perplexing questions with consummate ease, because with the wisdom of a godly simplicity. Not all the sages of Greece together could furnish to the world a treatise comparable to this. What was Plato's doctrine of the Republic in comparison with Paul's doctrine of the Church, or what is Plato on the immortality of the soul to Paul on the resurrection of the dead ?

How charming is Divine philosophy !
 Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose ;
 But musical as was Apollo's lute,
 And a perpetual feast of nectar'd sweets
 Where no crude surfeit reigns.

* “ Afflicted in all probability with ophthalmia, it was impossible for him, without pain and difficulty, to write his own letters. He therefore employed the aid of an amanuensis. But, partly to express his own personal interest in the last few words of blessing and greeting, partly to prevent the disgraceful forgeries which existed even at that early time, he authenticated every letter with his own signature and written benediction.”

“ St. Paul first adopted this final authentication or badge of cognisance in 2 Thess. iii. 17 ; and implies that he means henceforth to use it.”—Farrar : *Messages of the Books*, pp. 156, 157.

Dr. Farrar adds a valuable note on “ Early Christian Pseudopigraphy.”

II. CORINTHIANS.

IF the first Epistle to the Corinthians is the most varied and comprehensive of St. Paul's letters, the second is the most personal and impassioned. It is not systematic, argumentative, or expository, though full of matter and of force. Its distinctive merit is, that while everywhere exalting Christ, it shows us the man Paul of Tarsus, the follower of Christ, as he actually was, in labours, anxieties, suspense, and suffering; how sensitive and emotional, how tender and generous, and yet against false teachers how stern and resolute. It is not at all a treatise or essay constructed on a plan, but a warm outpouring of the Apostle's heart. Erasmus long ago compared its course to that of "a river which sometimes flows in a gentle stream, sometimes rushes down as a torrent bearing all before it, sometimes spreads out like a placid lake, sometimes loses itself, as it were, in the sand, and breaks out in its fulness at some unexpected place."

The letter was written in Macedonia, and very likely in the city of Philippi. The associate of the Apostle is not Sosthenes, as in the first Epistle, but Timothy. The address is (as in the first) to the Church of God at Corinth, and to the saints round about in Achaia, *i.e.* to the Christians in Greece. Then the Apostle at once begins by praising the Father of mercies and God of all consolation, and telling the Corinthians of distress through which he had passed, and in which he had found Divine comfort abounding in Christ.

For convenience of discussion, the Epistle may be arranged in three sections.

I. *The anxieties and consolations of St. Paul as a minister of the Gospel* (chaps. i.—vii.).

During the latter part of the Apostle's stay in Asia, his distress of mind had been almost insupportable. His long labour at Ephesus had ended in tumult and confusion; and to the vexation which this occasioned was added his intense concern to know how his first letter to Corinth had been received by the brethren, and what effect it had produced. This, too, brought another trouble upon St. Paul. He had intimated his intention to revisit Corinth, and was exposed to ill-natured reflections on his delay to do so, as though he were fickle of purpose, or "used lightness." He felt such an imputation keenly, and therefore in the opening paragraph of this letter disclaims all levity in connection with the momentous work of the Gospel, and explains that it was "to spare" the Corinthians he had delayed his visit. He would give time for his first Epistle to take effect, and would await tidings of its reception by the Church.

After his deep affliction in Asia, when he "despaired even of life," the Apostle went to Troas, hoping to meet Titus there, and through him to obtain the long-desired tidings from Corinth. But Titus came not, and St. Paul was so disheartened that he could not at that time give himself to Christian work. "When I came to Troas to preach Christ's Gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia."* Even in Macedonia, among the Christian congregations he loved so well, the Apostle still felt the oppression of suspense till Titus actually came. "For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you when he told us your earnest desire, your

* Chap. ii. 12, 13.

mourning, your fervent mind toward me, so that I rejoiced the more." * It was under the full flood of feeling stirred in his heart by the coming and the report of Titus, that St. Paul with Timothy indited this second Epistle.

How finely characteristic of this Apostle is the sudden rising out of his own distress into exultation over the Gospel and the preciousness of Christ! Whether in Asia Minor or in Macedonia, he never lost his consciousness of dignity and responsibility as a minister of the New Testament. "Now thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place." † Even that journey which St. Paul took in such depression of spirit was a triumphal march for the Gospel, and spread a fragrant "savour of Christ," like the incense in the public procession of ancient conquerors. Sweet and life-giving was that savour to believers; unwelcome and so deadly to unbelievers. Thus the apostolic preacher felt himself to be lifted above the common range of things. He was on a mission of life or death in every place; and, far from viewing this as a function easily fulfilled, wondered and trembled at the charge—"And who is sufficient for these things?"

Throughout three most memorable chapters, the 3d, 4th, and 5th, the Apostle expatiates on the ministry which he had received, and which sustained him in every place, so that he fainted not. It was of the New Testament excelling the Old Covenant in life and glory. It was a dispensation of light and clearness, not of veiled faces. St. Paul was entrusted with a manifestation of the truth in men's consciences—a message of reconciliation to their hearts. Invested with such a ministry, he bore all things for Jesus' sake. "In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God,

* Chap. vii. 5-7.

Chap. ii. 14.

by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left."*

These chapters abound in sayings or sentences which are much used as texts of evangelical discourse. If a preacher wishes to dwell on the grand theme of Christian testimony, he cannot do better than cite the verse, "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus, the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." If he would speak of the transforming power exerted by the contemplation of that theme, he may find its best expression in the words, "We all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Lord the Spirit." If he would express the result and evidence of believing union to Christ, he has this weighty sentence prepared for him, "If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things are passed away, behold, they are become new." So also, if one should desire to preach on God's way of peace, or on present support in labours for Christ, or on the future reward and joy, he cannot fail of fitting texts in the three chapters we have named.†

The elucidation of these great sayings of the Spirit of Christ in Paul is not for a synoptical lecture. What we now concern ourselves with is the strain of the whole. Before us we find a man of keen susceptibility, acutely conscious of suspense and suffering, sensitive as to the place he had in the confidence and affection of others, but upheld through all difficulties and toils by his persuasion of the value of that Gospel which was committed to his trust—walking by faith and not by sight, constrained by the love of Christ, resting on His death and resurrection, and labouring as one who could look at things not seen, and anticipate the solemn day of his appearing before the *Bema* or lordly seat of Jesus Christ. In the fear of the Lord he persuades men—he prays them in Christ's stead to be reconciled unto God. How can such a man be accounted for, his life and character explained, except on the ground that he had

* Chap. vi. 4-7.

† See chap. v. 19-21, iv. 16, iv. 17, v. 10.

a Divine embassy, carried in his heart and on his lips the Gospel of God, and was himself absorbed in the love of Jesus Christ? It cannot be supposed that he underwent so much, and in such a spirit, without any sufficient motive. Nor can it be reasonably held that the motive by which he was actuated was one of selfish or worldly ambition. Paul was unquestionably a man of shrewdness and ability, and one who knew mankind. It must have been quite evident to him that, by the course he took, he made himself not rich in the world but poor, not famous but infamous. In early life he had enjoyed the good opinion of his own nation, as a rising hope of the Pharisaic party, and a vigorous persecutor of the Christians. This was now turned to opprobrium. And the great world through which he moved, and in which he was so competent to play a distinguished part, scorned him as a witless fanatic. What animated him to hold on his way under such obloquy if not some motive far above mere ambition? What gave such elevation and endurance to his character if not the consciousness of a Divine mission to preach the Gospel of salvation, and the all-mastering power of love responding to the love of Him, the unseen Lord, "who died for us, and rose again"?

In the end of the 6th chapter occurs a passage which comes in abruptly, but is very weighty and forcible. It is an exhortation to purity of Church communion. Various hypotheses have been devised to account for the insertion of the paragraph at this place; but it is enough that the Apostle is writing out of a full heart (chap. vi. 11), and on that account disregards methodical sequence. He wishes to have the Corinthians enlarged in faith and love, but this is not to be brought about by latitudinarian indifference or by conformity to the world. Alas! for the Church that makes itself broad by embracing in one believer and unbeliever, light and darkness, the clean and the unclean. The word "Be ye enlarged" must be taken along with the word "Be ye separate." The first must preserve from bigotry—the second from degeneracy; and charity must go hand in hand with faith and holiness.

The first part of the Epistle now draws to a close. God, who comforts them that are cast down, had comforted Paul by the coming of Titus. The trusty messenger whom he had longed so much to see stood before him, and brought a report which was on the whole satisfactory. "He told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal toward me, so that I rejoiced yet more." The Corinthians had given a hearty welcome to Titus, and on receiving the first Epistle had been grieved and sorry for the evil which they had previously connived at. As to the particular case of which the Apostle had written, they had subjected the man "who had done the wrong" to a discipline severe, yet not inexorable. On hearing these tidings, St. Paul feels renewed confidence in the Corinthians, and, with his characteristic generosity of temper, tells them so. At the same time he hears with displeasure of a party at Corinth who impugned his apostolic authority, and has something to say on the subject before he concludes his letter.

II. *Touching the collection for the poor saints in Judea.*—The second division occupies the eighth and ninth chapters, and forms the only specimen extant of apostolic teaching on the duty and privilege of giving money to God and the poor. It speaks emphatically of the self-impoverishing love of Christ, as that which moves the heart to give. It describes a cheerful spirit in givers as pleasing to the Lord. It uses the stimulus of example to increase generosity, and exhibits the anxious desire of the Apostle—a care which all who institute collections ought to imitate—that the charge be not laid unduly on a few, but be divided fairly among all who are under a moral obligation to share in the work.

The Apostle tells those in Achaia—which was the southern province, that he had been speaking of their readiness to give, and had even boasted of them to their brethren in the northern province. In this way he had stirred the Macedonian Christians to begin the collection, and with excellent effect; for, on his return to Macedonia from Asia, he had been astonished at

the liberality shown by the poor congregations of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Now he feels some concern lest the Corinthians should not justify his boasting. Though they had begun first, they had allowed their collection to be forgotten or neglected. He is about to send Titus again to them, with two companions, to receive the proof of their love. Therefore he warns the Corinthians that it will be a grief and shame to him if they are found unready, and if his boasting regarding them shall prove to have been an exaggeration and a mistake.

It is well to mark how much attention the foremost of all the apostles gave to such a matter as the collection of money. Men who love the ministry of the Word usually feel it distasteful and irksome to occupy themselves much with pecuniary arrangements and efforts; and it is quite according to Scripture that they should "not leave the Word of God to serve tables," but should remit the management of money in the Church to deacons in whom the brethren have confidence. But it is not scriptural or safe for them to ignore altogether the doctrine and practice of giving. They ought rather to follow the example of the Apostle Paul, in keeping in mind the collections that ought to be made, and stirring up the Christian people to do liberally and cheerfully for the cause of Christ and the relief of His poor.

It is not right to let the money of the Lord's house be collected and managed on mere earthly principles. The treasury of His temple is holy. Those who put money into it should be reminded that Christ sits over against the treasury. Those who give contributions ought to regard them in the light here thrown around them by St. Paul, exercising liberality under the grace of God, making an offering with the same reverence as belongs to prayer and praise, and with such an overwhelming sense of the Lord's goodness as will lead them, not to speak of their own gifts, but to repeat with humble joy the words which close this second part of the Epistle: "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

III. *The vindication of St. Paul's apostolic authority* (chaps. x.—xiii.).—No longer is Timothy associated. The writer is “I, Paul, myself.” And the tone becomes very firm, sometimes even stern and sarcastic.

A strong anti-Pauline party had arisen at Corinth, headed by certain teachers, here designated “false apostles.” In reply to their objection that he had brought no commendatory letters, St. Paul maintains that he needed none, and that the converts under his ministry formed for him a sufficient testimonial. In knowledge, in labours, and in sufferings, he was not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles. It was painful to him to be obliged to make such statements. “I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.” Self-assertion is sometimes needful, and may be quite compatible with unfeigned humility before the Lord. The brethren at Corinth were being misled by men who envied and calumniated the very founder of their Church. In such circumstances St. Paul was bound to vindicate himself, and to show how fully his apostolic position was evidenced by his apostolic life, his fruitful labours, patient sufferings, and abundant revelations.

Then he gives warning, that on his approaching visit to Corinth he “will not spare.” Those who have demanded some proof of Christ's speaking in him, shall have proof enough if they compel him to use sharpness according to the power which the Lord has given him “for building up, and not for pulling down.”

With these words (chap. xiii. 10), the substance of the Epistle may be said to end. Nothing remains but a concluding counsel, salutation, and benediction. These form a sweet and graceful close, all the more welcome after the keen and indignant tone of some of the previous sentences:

“Finally, brethren, rejoice; be perfected; be comforted; be

of the same mind; live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you."

After the salutation follows the benediction invoked from the Holy Trinity in the form now so familiar through constant repetition in Church Service. Those who quote it, sometimes change the order so as to begin with the love of God the Father; but there is good reason for the order in which St. Paul wrote the sentence. He begins with the favour of our Lord Jesus Christ, which in his own time of need had been promised as sufficient (chap. xii. 9). This grace of Christ leads into the love of God, and this love is central in benediction. In this home and rest of the human spirit, believers are kept by the communion of the Holy Ghost. Therefore this closes and perfects the blessing,—“The communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all.”

GALATIANS.

CONSIDERED simply as a production of St. Paul, this Epistle is very characteristic of the man, full of his force and earnestness. Considered as a part of Holy Writ, clothed with a Divine authority, it is a work of the Holy Spirit, of great value to the Church, as a vindication at once of the grace and of the holiness of the Gospel.

It was St. Paul himself who first preached the Gospel in that inland district of Asia Minor which was called Galatia. Two visits paid by him to that region are mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles.* It appears from allusions in the Epistle that on his first visit the Apostle was suffering greatly from a thorn in the flesh,—some humiliating and enfeebling ailment; but the impulsive Galatians received him with delight, “as an angel of God.” † After the elapse of about three years he paid a second visit to that district, and went through it in order, “strengthening all the disciples.” But he met a comparatively cold reception; and after his departure the Galatian Churches were more and more alienated from him through the influence of a party hostile to his teaching on grace and liberty. At length this mischief grew so serious that the Apostle thought it needful to write to the Churches of Galatia, and to remonstrate with them on their fickleness of spirit, and their departure from the truth.

The Galatians were Gauls or Celts who had emigrated from the West and seized on a great part of Asia Minor. In course of time they were hemmed in within a district, and at last fell

* Acts xvi. 6, xviii. 23.

† Chap. iv. 13-15.

under the all-subduing power of Rome. In the East they had become enervated and corrupted, and, mingling with the old Phrygian race, whom they had vanquished, had adopted many of their religious ideas and customs. But they retained the faults of the Gallic and Celtic nature, and were not only impetuous but unreliable, incapable of sustained purpose, reckless, vainglorious, and contentious.

Thus the population out of which the Galatian Churches were gathered was a semi-barbarous mass of degenerate Gauls mingled with passionate Phrygians. Among these there dwelt a considerable number of Jews, for Antiochus the Great settled two thousand Jewish families in Lydia and Phrygia, and the descendants of these must have overflowed into Galatia. Others were no doubt drawn thither by the pursuits of commerce, for the country was rich, and much of the trade from the far East to the shores of the *Ægean* passed through the Galatian cities. These men brought a very disturbing element into the Churches, for the Jews who lived far from Jerusalem were often the most fanatical in their Judaism; and in point of fact, though dangers from heathen looseness did beset the Galatian Churches, the greatest trouble arose from men who inculcated the obligation of circumcision, and justification by the law of Moses.

There can be no question that the Epistle before us was written subsequently to the Apostle's second visit to Galatia. No sooner was he relieved as to the state of the Churches in Achaia by the coming of Titus, than his mind was burdened about the errors of the Galatians, for at this time there came on him "daily the care of all the Churches." So he wrote this letter, as we suppose, after his second to the Corinthians, and just before the Epistle to the Romans. There is internal evidence of this. The strain of self-vindication which marks 2 Corinthians is continued in Galatians. There is, on the part of the writer, the same sensitiveness as to the confidence which the Churches placed in him, the same affirmation of his apostolate, the same vehemence against the false teachers who depreciated

his authority, and perverted his Gospel. Then there is a preparation for the Epistle to the Romans in the consecutive setting forth of doctrine and practice. This may be called a first draft of that more finished and rounded production; this the bold but somewhat fragmentary assertion of truths which are there more comprehensively and systematically taught.

This letter has none of the joyful and affectionate expressions with which the other epistles of Paul begin. The salutation is almost stern. The first words are, "Paul an apostle," his apostleship having been disputed; "not from men," but from God, therefore not like that of the false apostles; and "not through man," but directly through Jesus Christ, who had appointed him, and therefore on a par with the apostolate of the Twelve. At the same time St. Paul would have the Galatians understand that he was not alone in his view of their misconduct. "All the brethren" who were with him concurred with him, preached the same Gospel, and grieved to hear of its perversion.

He does not write to the Galatians as "called saints," but addresses them simply as "the Churches of Galatia." This is the more remarkable, because though there was a low moral tone at Corinth with much party spirit and confusion, the Apostle addresses the brethren there as sanctified in Christ Jesus. The reason of his greater reserve toward the Galatians seems to be that they had trifled with the light imparted to them, and were guilty of unfaithfulness to the Gospel. Yet there is love in all his severity. He wishes the Galatians grace and peace, and reminds them of the death of Jesus and the will of God "to deliver us from this present evil world."

The letter thus begun proceeds in an order which admits of an easy threefold division. Each section contains two chapters.

I. *A vindication of St. Paul's apostolate* (chaps. i. and ii.).—It was charged against him that he had never been duly set apart, or constituted an apostle by ecclesiastical appointment or ordination. He grants it, and glories in it. The apostolate originated with Christ only, and could not be conferred by men,

or transmitted from one generation to another. It came not from man, or even through man, but directly from the Lord. Even the case of Matthias did not contravene this principle, for he was chosen by the Lord, and was not ordained to apostleship by the brethren.

St. Paul dwells on it with great emphasis, that he has been chosen of the Lord and not of man, and taught by revelation of the Lord, not by conference with flesh and blood. No word of any apostle was used to convert him to the faith, but he was arrested by a vision on the way to Damascus. Then his relation to the Gospel is unique, for it had been directly revealed to him by the Lord. Even when he met and conferred with those who had been apostles before him in Judea, he did not ask or derive from them any sanction for his message and work, but exchanged fraternal salutations.

Indeed, at Antioch he had actually been obliged to remonstrate with the Apostle Peter, and withstand him to the face, rather than allow Christian liberty to be limited or compromised. St. Peter knew well, for he had been taught by a vision at Joppa, that he was not to count the Gentiles unclean; and yet with a touch of his old weakness in the hour of trial, he played false to his principles, to propitiate the Judaic party at Antioch, and separated himself from the Gentile brethren. St. Paul, who had thought out the question far more thoroughly than the Galilean Apostle, openly remonstrated with him, and maintained the equality of the Gentiles with the Jews under the new dispensation of grace.

A very perplexing incident is this to those who think that St. Peter was pope, and therefore infallible: a very clear disproof, we think, of any such proposition. But, on the other hand, we should be careful not to press it to a conclusion unduly derogatory to that great Apostle. He had fits of infirm purpose after his bravest movements; but, while it is highly honourable to Paul that he openly withstood his senior, rather than betray or compromise the rights of the Gentile Christians, it is also extremely creditable to Simon Peter that he, a pillar in the

Church, submitted to such a rebuke with humility, and, far from resenting it, mentions his junior in his last Epistle with special distinction as "Our beloved brother Paul."

The first section of the Epistle closes with a terse statement of the Apostle's personal relation to the law and to grace. The passage (chap. ii. 19-21) is termed by Bengel "*summa ac medulla Christianismi.*" "Through the law," Paul was dead to the law, that he might live to God. In that consciousness of union with Christ, which he afterwards explains more fully in his Epistle to the Romans, he regards himself as crucified with the Lord, and thereby conclusively separated from his old self-life under the law, and brought into a newness of life, as by resurrection,—a life which had no root in Saul of Tarsus, but issued from Christ living, by the Spirit, in the new man, Paul of Damascus. His career thenceforth was by faith in the Son of God, who loved him, and gave Himself for him.*

II. *An exposure of the folly of relapsing under legal bondage* (chaps. iii. iv.).—This forms the main theme of the Epistle.

It begins with a vigorous interrogation,—“O foolish (inconsiderate) Galatians! who hath bewitched you,† before whose eyes Jesus Christ crucified was placarded (proclaimed)?” What bewitched them, or cast an evil spell over them, was the “different gospel” of false teachers who drew them back under the law, insisted on circumcision in the flesh, required the observance of Jewish festivals, and inculcated justification by works. In the view of St. Paul this was a declension from liberty to bondage, and from the Spirit to the flesh; not a mere alteration or even distortion, but a downright reversal of the Gospel of Christ. He fights against it with the sword of his mouth. The Galatians have been misled by their new teachers through a misuse of the Old Testament; and therefore St. Paul refers them to the ancient Scriptures, and shows them that the pro-

* “Observe the *μέ* and *ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ* as expressive of the conscious and assured *fiducia* in the *fides.*”—*Meyer, in loc.*

† “O insensi Galatæ, quis vos fascinavit?”—*Vulg.*

mise of grace to Abraham preceded by hundreds of years the law of works through Moses, and that the law was added really to prepare for the time of richer grace in Christ, shutting men up "unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed." All who are of faith are blessed with Abraham. All who are of the works of the law are under the curse, for it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

The Apostle shows that the law has condemning power, but that no man is justified thereby. He then points out the beneficial training influence of the law, preparing for the Gospel, leading on to Christ as the pedagogue in ancient cities led children to the master, and charged with a moral guardianship of His people, while yet immature or under age. Thus the whole dispensation of the law was one of subordinate rank, conducting to the higher dispensation of the Gospel. It had ordinances in the flesh, as circumcision. It had an earthly sanctuary at Jerusalem. It had a very imperfect realisation of Sonship,—“The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all, but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.” It had a minute prescription of holy seasons and observances, which are now void of meaning,—mere “weak and beggarly elements.” A man under the law was required to observe days, months, times, and years, but no such obligation lies on a man under the Gospel. In Christ we have redemption from the curse of the law, and exemption from its tutelage and constraint. We have the adoption of sons, the Spirit of adoption, and the holy liberty of heirs of God according to the promise.

This is illustrated by a striking reference to the family of Abraham. An allegorical meaning is found in the two mothers, Hagar and Sarah, and their sons, Ishmael and Isaac. They represent in contrast the law and the promise, bondage and liberty. Hagar the bondwoman, Ishmael the son after the flesh, Sinai the mountain of the law in Arabia, the Jerusalem beneath, occupied by the Christ-rejecting Jews—all these are on one side,

and are connected with Abraham, but not according to the promise. On the other hand, believers on Christ are related through the Gospel to Sarah, the free-woman, Isaac, born after the Spirit, and the Jerusalem which is above, which is free, which is the mother of us all, and which will yet come down out of heaven from our God.

If the Galatians had understood this contrast, they would never have hearkened to the false teachers, or allowed themselves to be again entangled with the yoke of bondage.

III. *A practical exhortation.*—In St. Paul's view, bondage of conscience is sure to lead to a fleshly walk—liberty of heart in conscious sonship and heirship to a spiritual walk before God (chap. v. vi.) Faith works by love; and liberty is not license to please oneself, but a freedom from evil restraints in order to render loving service to God and the brethren. The Apostle sets forth two alternatives and contrasts—(1.) The Spirit against the flesh; (2.) The cross against the world.

1. The spirit is born of the Spirit.* It is the sacred vitality and sensibility, animated and guided by the indwelling Spirit of Christ Jesus. It is known by its fruit. Men often speak of the fruits of the Spirit, but the Apostle is careful to say fruit—one holy fruit or result, comprising many virtues. Love is the juice of the fruit, sweet to God and man; joy, its beautiful bloom; peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, form its mellow softness; faith is its consistence, and also forms its characteristic and incomparable flavour; temperance is the rind of the fruit, binding it together, keeping it fresh, and preserving its good qualities from waste.

The flesh is born of the flesh—human nature under inherited and accustomed sinfulness. It acts from self will, and builds up a religion of self-righteousness. Its works are manifest: not its fruit, nor even its work, because it has no inward harmony to produce unity of result: but its works in great profusion appear. The Apostle gives not a catalogue of them, but a few

* John iii. 6.

specimens, describing them as the sins of sensuality, idolatry, malice, and excess.*

On this the Galatians are exhorted to walk in the Spirit, and to develop that which is first named in the fruit of the Spirit, viz., love. "Let us not be vainglorious, provoking one another, envying one another. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

2. The cross of Christ against the world. The new teachers in Galatia maintained the obligation of circumcision, and wished to glory over the submission of the converts to a fleshly rite. St. Paul, who now regarded such rites as mere rudiments of the world, would glory only in the cross of Christ, by which he was quite separated from the world, and brought into the new creation. He testifies that in Christ Jesus that creation availed everything, but circumcision and uncircumcision availed nothing. He points to the very size and firmness of his handwriting as indicating the intensity of his conviction and the solemnity of his admonition, "Look you in what large letters I write with mine own hand."† He began the Epistle with allusion to Christ's death as intended to deliver us from this present evil world; and now he ends it by declaring that the cross of Christ obliterates mere worldly rudiments and fleshly distinctions in religion. There is a new creation, with a new atmosphere of motive and sympathy, a new life in the Spirit, a new hope to cheer, and a new principle to actuate, viz., faith which works by love.

To walk according to the rule of a religion in the flesh and of the world can only end in confusion. But the Apostle has a benediction for as many as walk according to this rule of new creatureship. "Peace be on them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God," as distinguished from the mere Israel after the flesh which boasted in the law.

So Paul makes an end. Let who will impugn his relation to Christ, he bears "the stigmata of Jesus" in the marks of his good fight of faith, and his many afflictions. Then, breathing

* See chap. v. 19-23.

† Chap. vi. 11.

always the disposition befitting an apostle of the Lamb, he concludes, not with menaces or curses of the law, but with a kindly prayer for the Galatians,—“Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.” It is the only Church epistle in which this form is used; and an emphasis lies on spirit as against the flesh. No grace can possibly come upon the flesh. It is crucified with its affections and lusts. The grace of the Lord Jesus is with our spirit, or not with us at all: and His Spirit is to bear witness with our spirits that we are children of God.

This Epistle may in one sense be called obsolete. The Jewish form of a false gospel we never think of. No one among us supposes that the way of salvation is to be found in fleshly circumcision, and in strict observance of the laws of Moses, and the traditions of the Jews. But in other forms false gospels abound. The truth as it is in Jesus, where not denied, is often badly adulterated. A religion is taught which derives all its strength from form and tradition; and the only thing that avails in Christ Jesus—viz., the new creation—is unthought of, or referred to some sacramental ceremony. To combat these errors the Epistle to the Galatians is fresh and powerful as ever. It was a true instinct which led Martin Luther to give much of his time to the exposition of it, in order to establish the doctrine of faith; and we want it still to smite self-righteousness and religious externalism root and branch, and to teach that a man, in order to be justified, must believe in Christ, and, in order to be sanctified, must be crucified with Christ. The Epistle is full of animation, argument, and reproof; but above all and best of all, it is full of grace. So it teaches a lesson for all time—that sinners are saved by grace, and saints are preserved by grace. Just because it impresses these great truths, the Epistle to the Galatians can never fail to hold a place of honour in the lips of faithful preachers, and in the grateful appreciation of all the enlightened children of God.

EPHESIANS.

THE Epistles to the Corinthians and Galatians bear very directly and specially on the condition of the Churches to which they were sent, and cannot be appreciated or even understood without some knowledge of local and historical circumstances. The case is quite different with the Epistle to the Ephesians. It is not even absolutely certain that the designation is a correct one, for the words "in Ephesus" are wanting in one of the very oldest manuscripts. The absence of those local allusions, personal messages and salutations, which abound in the other Epistles, makes it probable that this letter was so composed as to be of use to the neighbouring congregations in the province of Asia, as well as to the saints at Ephesus; and early copies may have been transmitted to them.* It was written from Rome, during St. Paul's first imprisonment there. His mind was then in its highest vigour, and his spirit full of life and liberty. Accordingly this Epistle is distinguished by a lofty eloquence. It has not the abruptness or the swift exchange of question and answer which characterise the two Epistles that precede it; but it has large declarations of truth, and outpourings of desire in which clause is linked to clause till the sentences fill and swell with great conceptions.

The Ephesian converts are described in the Acts of the Apostles as publicly burning their books of sorcery.† The value of the books is put on record—50,000 drachmas, or

* Bishop Lightfoot has described this Epistle as "a circular letter to the Asiatic Churches, which got its ultimate designation from the metropolitan city."

† Acts xix. 18, 19.

£1875. Truly they were well recompensed when they got this Epistle to lead them, not into magic and sorcery, but into the mystery of Christ, and hidden wisdom of God. They had burned evil and superstitious volumes, and they obtained a book which cannot be valued in silver and gold—an Epistle of wonderful breadth and power, full of riches of the mind, and the warm flow of a master spirit.

After a salutation and benediction, which are in the Apostle's usual manner, the letter launches forth at once upon the copious spiritual blessings which God has conferred upon His people in Jesus Christ. Its tenor throughout may be called doctrinal and practical, as is the case in the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians; but no very exact division can be marked. Enough that three chapters relate to Christian privilege, and three to Christian duty. The first part describes our standing in grace; the second treats of our walk and warfare.

I. The first part (chaps. i.—iii.) is mainly doctrinal, and the doctrine is of salvation by grace. This, however, is not maintained so controversially as in the two doctrinal Epistles we have just mentioned. The question how a man may be justified is not discussed. The law is mentioned only once. The great themes are the spiritual blessings bestowed in Christ, and the formation and calling of the Church.

There is a distinction, not often marked by readers, between "us" and "you." The Apostle declares what God had done for "us"—*i.e.* for those who first hoped in Christ, and carried the gospel of His grace into the province of Asia. In the splendid opening passage (chap. i. 3-12), St. Paul does not describe the blessedness of the Ephesians, for he uses the words "we" and "us." Writing in the assurance of God's love, he tells of the eternal purpose of the Father—redemption by the Son, acceptance (being enveloped in grace) in the Beloved, the obtaining of the inheritance, and the ultimate design of the Father to gather together in one all things in Christ. Within a few verses there is a copious recital of spiritual blessings; and all

are traced back to their foundation in the eternal love of God. Then the Apostle addresses the Ephesians as "you also," and declares that the same privileges and consolations are opened to them. Having believed the word of truth as soon as they heard it, they share all things with those who had hoped in Christ before them. Nay, "*ye* are sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise which is the earnest of *our* inheritance." They who receive the Gospel at second hand, or by transmission from others, are placed at no disadvantage. For all believers there is the same inheritance with Christ, and there is the same earnest of that inheritance. Moreover, in every case—whether of the earlier or the later believers, the "us" or the "you,"—the spiritual blessings emanate from the same source—the purpose and pleasure of God; and all tend to the same issue—"unto the praise of His glory." *

The first chapter ends with a sublime prayer of intercession in behalf of the Ephesian saints. St. Paul desires their spiritual illumination. They have the spirit of life; he asks for them the spirit of wisdom. They have a holy calling; he asks that the eyes of their hearts may be opened, so that they may know "the hope of His calling." They have forgiveness through the death of Christ: he asks that they may know in themselves the power which God put forth in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. The prayer ends with mention of the exaltation of the Saviour, and His headship over all to the Church, which is His body. Then these thoughts run through all the remainder of the Epistle. It recognises the heavenly places, and sees the Church in elevation with Christ, regarding it as His mystical Body, His holy Temple; and His ransomed Bride.

The second chapter is full and clear on the salvation which is in Christ. It shows in what a pit of moral death and degradation God found the Ephesians, and to what an elevation He had raised them, actuated throughout by his own "great love." They were dead in sins, and He quickened and raised

* Chap. i. 12-14.

them in Christ. They walked in the course of the world, and He lifted them up to sit in heavenly places.

The thought occurs again and again that all this is conducive to the glory of God in the ages to come. It shows now, and will show to those ages, the exceeding riches of His grace, for the salvation is "by grace through faith." Works are excluded, for two reasons: (1.) Boasting must be excluded (chap. ii. 9);* (2.) Good works are the ordained result of salvation (chap. ii. 10), and so cannot be its cause or ground. Salvation is not of works, because it is in order to works; and nothing is gained, but everything lost, by disturbing the Divine arrangement.

This Epistle, however, treats not so much of the salvation of an individual, as of the privilege and dignity of the saved community. It proceeds to show that the separation of Jew and Gentile is abolished in Christ through His peace-procuring death; that they are alike reconciled to God, and moulded into one body, grouped in one citizenship, builded together into one temple, fitly framed together as an habitation of God in the Spirit. Such union is no human device; it is the Divine will. Whatever the original quarries from which the living stones are hewn, whatever the ignorances and prejudices of those who are converted to Christ, those stones are to be brought together, compacted in fellowship, and edified or upbuilt in love, so that the whole temple may grow together in the Lord. St. Paul loves the illustrations of a temple and a body,† and interchanges the expressions proper to each. Thus he writes of the growth of the temple, and the upbuilding of the body in love.‡

The position of Gentile believers in the body of Christ, and in the heirship with Christ, was "a mystery," *i.e.* a thing long hidden, but now revealed in the Spirit. To St. Paul especially had this mystery been made known by revelation, and by him was it declared as a great distinction of this age or dispensation. Now, it was not a new thing that the Jewish saints should be

* Compare Romans iii. 27.

† The combination of ideas rests on John ii. 19-21.

‡ Chap. ii. 21; iv. 6.

the temple of the Lord, or the heirs of promise. Neither was it a new thing in revelation that Gentiles as well as Jews should be saved through the Messiah; for this was known to Abraham, announced by Isaiah, and preached by Simon Peter. But it was a mystery now for the first time disclosed, that the saved Jews and Gentiles should form one Temple, one Body, one Church of the living God, moving on to the inheritance of the saints in light. So a new wonder rose not only on the minds of men, but on "the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,"—the wonder of the Church unperceived before, displaying to heaven and earth the manifold wisdom of God.

The third chapter ends, like the first, with a prayer of glowing spiritual ardour. On his bended knees at Rome, the apostolic prisoner beseeches the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for the saints in far distant Ephesus, that they may have a more powerful indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and a richer experimental acquaintance with the love of Christ, which passes knowledge. Then this first part of the Epistle, having opened up the doctrine of the Church, concludes with a doxology to God "in the Church." Glory to God the hearer of prayer, and the mighty Worker in us, "to all the generations of the age of ages,"—throughout all the sublime procession of the ages to come!

II. The practical part of the Epistle begins at the fourth chapter, which opens with directions for the Christian walk. If the Ephesians were sitting in heavenly places as respects nearness and access to God in Christ, that privilege ought to induce a holy and consistent walk on the earth. It would ill become them—it ill becomes any one, to glory in celestial privilege, unless there be an honest endeavour to purify the terrestrial life. Before their conversion the Ephesians had walked according to the course of this world. After it they are bound to walk worthy of their new calling; and this is explained further by the following expressions—walking not as

other Gentiles walk, walking in love, walking as children of light, walking circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.*

It is a high vocation which Christians receive, but it requires a lowly mind. It should be pursued "with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." From this exhortation the Apostle is led to open out the blessed doctrine of sevenfold unity, and to show the provision made by our ascended Lord for preserving the oneness of His saints, and the harmonious growth of the Church. He has given to His people (1.) apostles, and (2.) prophets; these being for the foundation of the Church; (3.) evangelists for its extension; and (4.) pastors and teachers for stationary work of consolidation and instruction. These are given in order to the "perfecting," or thorough equipment and training of saints to their "work of ministry" in truth and love.†

Outward conduct depends on inward principles. To walk in purity requires a renewal in the spirit of the mind. So we must learn Christ, and the truth as it is in Jesus. The old man must be put off. Such is the comprehensive rule to be carried out, as conscience directs, into particular applications. A blow must be struck at the very constitution of sin, and then sins may be mastered in detail. Specimens of this are given in regard to the breach of certain commandments of the moral law.

Breaches of the 9th Commandment—See chap. iv. 25, 31.

Breaches of the 6th Commandment—See chap. iv. 26, 31.

Breaches of the 8th Commandment—See chap. iv. 28.

Breaches of the 7th Commandment—See chap. v. 3-5.

But a merely negative renewal is ineffective, is indeed impossible. The new man must be put on, viz., the image of Christ with the life of Christ. This is "after God," created within us; and its element is "righteousness and holiness of

* Chap. iv. 1, 17; v. 2, 8, 15.

† Chap. iv. 11, 12.

truth," in happy contrast with the old man's "lusts of deceit."

Then the exhortations accumulate. "Be ye therefore imitators of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave Himself up for us." "Now are ye light in the Lord; walk as children of light." Men so enlightened should walk cautiously, redeeming the time and discerning their Lord's will, but not gloomily or despondingly, for they should speak and sing as they go, being filled with the Spirit, making melody to the Lord Jesus, and giving thanks always for all things to the Father in His name.

The law of love implies mutual submission and concession. "Subjecting yourselves one to another, in the fear of Christ." This is the principle of church-fellowship, and as the nucleus of the Church is the family, the Apostle proceeds to show how the law of submission in love ought to pervade domestic life. A wife should submit to her husband in love, as the Church to Christ. A husband ought to love his wife as his own body, for so Christ loved the Church. Children should obey their parents in the Lord, for this is right: and fathers should remember the law of love in training their children,—“Provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” So also ought servants to obey masters, and masters to treat servants as in the fear of the Lord Christ; servants showing “good will,” and masters “forbearing threatening,” because both parties are under a Christian obligation to walk in lowliness and love.

At the tenth verse of the sixth chapter begins a very vigorous passage of admonition. The saints have been regarded as *seated* in heavenly places: they have been admonished to *walk* humbly on the earth: and now they are bidden to *stand* in the evil day. “Stand against the wiles of the devil”—having done all, “stand”—“stand therefore, having your loins girt about.”

As a child of light pursues the way of his duty he meets many adversaries, and the worst of these are unseen. They

are infernal principalities and powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, who seek to delude in regard to the supernal things, employing wiles of the devil, shooting forth fiery darts of the wicked. But God has provided for the child of light a panoply for the evil day—(1.) The girdle of truth, giving strength and comeliness to Christian character. (2.) The breastplate of righteousness, or rather the coat of mail, which covers the body all round from the neck to the thighs, guarding all the vital parts. (3.) The shoes, or rather the war-boots (*caligæ*) of the preparation of the gospel of peace, indicating firmness of tread and alacrity of spirit. (4.) The shield of faith over all, defending the armour as well as the armed man, capable of being turned hither and thither to meet every attack, and of quenching fiery darts. (5.) The helmet of salvation, *i.e.* the hope of salvation.* This protects the head, the seat of thought and principle. A Christian must beware how he loosens his helmet. If his good hope be relaxed, he may be seriously wounded in the head. (6.) The sword of the Spirit, the searching, piercing word of God. The sword is a weapon useful both for attack and for defence; but it is of little service in unskilled hands. Whoso would be a good soldier of Christ, must not only possess such a sword, but learn to wield it. (7.) All prayer, without which the strongest and most experienced may be worsted in the evil day. All great Christians have excelled in, and prevailed by persevering, vigilant, and affectionate prayer.

The Apostle adds a request that the Ephesians would pray for him, yet not that he should be delivered from bonds at Rome, but that he might speak boldly in that great city, as he ought to speak. Such was his noble passion for preaching Christ. Then a kind notice of Tychicus, who bore this letter to Ephesus, draws it to a close.

The actual conclusion is sweet and gentle. "Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Peace of reconciliation they had: now

* Compare 1 Thess. v. 8.

let them have peace of obedience, and of communion with God and with one another. Faith they had, and so were saved by grace: now let them have increase of faith for the conflicts they must endure, and with it much love, in order to stand together, grow together, walk together, and be edified together. The last sentence is, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."* No one loves Him as He ought to be loved; and we may be thankful that the blessing is not for those that sufficiently love Him, but for all that sincerely love the Saviour. Blessed is every one who can truly say—"Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee."

* The Revised Version has "in incorruptness," a rendering which aims at very close translation, but is clumsy English.

PHILIPPIANS.

NOT combative, like the Epistle to the Galatians, or perhaps so profound as the Epistle to the Ephesians, what is now before us is a loving and edifying letter from St. Paul to a Church which had a very strong hold on his affections. It was through his own labours that the Church of Philippi was founded, in the conversion of Lydia, and the baptism of her and her household, the deliverance of a female slave possessed with a Pythonic spirit, and a wonderful conversion of the jailer, followed by the baptism of him and his household.* His first mission closed abruptly, but he visited the Philippians again, and through his friends and emissaries maintained a close friendship with them. Their loyal affection to him was proved by substantial gifts repeatedly sent to supply his wants; and although St. Paul was a man of fine sensitiveness in regard to obligations, he had no scruple in accepting such kindness from his children in the Gospel at Philippi. It was a gift from them, sent through Epaphroditus, which was the occasion of this Epistle. It reached St. Paul during his captivity at Rome, and he sent back through the same Epaphroditus this letter of thanks; but wrote it with such fulness of teaching and consolation, that the Philippians must have felt the obligation to be on their part still. It was a small matter that they ministered in carnal things to one who ministered to them in spiritual things so abundantly.

The letter alleges no doctrinal error against the Philippians; nor does it reprove any sin or practical fault. It opens easily

* On the significance of these three conversions, see Bishop Lightfoot on this Epistle. Third edition, pp. 51-56.

and graciously. Nothing is said of St. Paul's apostleship, for at Philippi it had not been called in question. The epistle professes to proceed from "Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ," for these had laboured together in Macedonia; and it is addressed to "all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." It is a very important description of a primitive Christian community. The Church was formed of saints in Christ Jesus—partakers of the holy calling, persons separated to God in Christ. Its officers were in two orders, not three. First were the bishops, overseers, or superintendents; certainly not diocesan bishops, prelates, or church princes, but the elders who took the oversight of the flock in and around the town of Philippi. After them came the deacons, practical men chosen from among the brethren to handle and administer Church affairs, and to consider the case of the poor.

To the saints with the bishops and deacons, Paul and Timothy wish grace and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Then the Epistle proceeds as in the name of Paul only,—a real letter, not a treatise, not an argument, not a sermon, not even a tract, but a letter which flows on without stiffness or precision, as some silver stream may wind among the fertile meadows.

All that we can attempt is to indicate what is most prominent in each of the four chapters.

I. *The magnanimity of the Apostle* (chap. i.).—This is not all that we have in the chapter, but it is very conspicuous. Though St. Paul is in bonds, and to a man of his active temperament the restraint must have been very irksome, he seems quite to forget his own affliction in his loving care for his children and friends at Philippi, whom he has in his heart, whom he loves in the tenderness of Christ, and for whose progress he earnestly prays.

The cause of the Gospel is everything to him; personal ease or comfort nothing. His bonds at Rome sit light upon him,

provided the Gospel be not bound. And he has been severely tested on this very point. Some preachers unworthy of that dignity, actuated by a spirit of envy, had preached in Rome, hoping to render more galling the Apostle's bondage. He is quite aware of their factious tempers and discreditable motives ; but with rare and splendid magnanimity, he looks over and beyond those peevish preachers to the great end which the proclamation of the Gospel was fitted to promote—the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and rejoices that in any way his Divine Master's name is made known within the great and populous city of Rome. "What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached ; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." It is one of the most nobly unselfish sayings in all history ; the utterance of a sweet and loving spirit, purified from all petulant feeling, absorbed in the name and glory of the beloved Saviour.

Yet it was not a very clear or complete gospel that the envious and contentious preachers delivered. In all probability, they belonged to that Judaizing party which everywhere opposed the doctrine of St. Paul ; and we have seen that the Apostle, writing to the Galatians, handled such persons and their devices with severity. The question arises, How is the stern reprobation expressed in that Epistle to be reconciled with the magnanimous allowance in this? The explanation lies in the different condition of the Churches. In Galatia, the teachers whom St. Paul denounced, were disturbing and misleading congregations that had previously received the Gospel in its simplicity and holy liberty. They subverted that Gospel, and brought the unstable Galatians again under a yoke of bondage. But at Rome, the great difficulty was to make Christ known at all to the mixed population of the vast metropolis ; and it was something gained, to have the Saviour preached, even by men who were ill-affected toward His apostle. Best of all, to have well-affected preachers, but at such a time, and in such a place, better any preachers than none at all. Though the men referred to were themselves actuated by a very unbrotherly spirit, they

might at all events arrest the attention of some to the name of Jesus Christ. Let them cast out demons, if they can, in His name ; St. Paul will not forbid them.

Bondman or freeman, living or dying, the Apostle is resolved that Christ for him shall be supreme, and he will desire nothing more than to be the means of glorifying and magnifying his Saviour. On earth he will be a living sacrifice : and if he be delivered to death, the Lord's will be done and His name exalted. "To live is Christ"—a manifestation of Christ, who is at once the strength, the model, and the end or object of holy living. "To die is gain"—escape from conflicts, temptations, slanders, and persecutions—reception into the presence of the Lord. What to choose St. Paul perceives not, and feels as one hemmed in and at a loss. He is content to live ; more than content to die. His mind is like a ship at anchor with a fair wind, detained for some good reason in the roadstead, yet eager to lift the anchor, spread the sails, and set out to sea. By duty and affection he is bound to the Church on earth ; yet he is much drawn to the Lord in heaven, and has a desire to depart.

Here, again, see how large-souled and devoted a man is Paul the prisoner. He wants to be with Christ, and considers death welcome in any cruel form, because departure to the Lord "is very far better" than any continued life upon earth ; but for the good of others he is willing to abide in the flesh. He began by sacrificing his position and religious reputation as a Pharisee in order to labour in the Gospel : in pursuing that labour he relinquished all worldly ease, emolument, and comfort : and now he is content to forego for a while even the highest joy of all—that of being with Christ—provided that there is still work for him to do on earth in the advancement of his fellow Christians, their "furtherance and joy of faith."

II. *The mind of Christ* (chap. ii.).—At the 27th verse of the first chapter, the Apostle commences an exhortation to the

Philippian saints regarding their calling and duty as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. The same idea of citizenship recurs in the end of the third chapter; and there may be a special reason for the use of such language in this Epistle. St. Paul writes from Rome, the greatest city of the world; and those to whom he writes are at Philippi, which was a Roman "colonia," and therefore politically a miniature of Rome itself. It was there that the Apostle alarmed the prætors, who had imprisoned him, by announcing himself a Roman citizen.* This incident must have been fresh in the memory of the Philippian believers as well as in his own, and in all likelihood suggested his appeal to them that they should bear themselves as the freemen of a holy city, and partakers of a heavenly calling.

He then teaches that harmony, kindness, humility, and unselfishness are the ornament and strength of a Church, while discord, selfishness, and vainglory are its bane and shame. He sets before the Philippians the mind of Christ as the essence of practical Christianity; and expatiates with enthusiasm on the condescension and exaltation of our Lord.

The Saviour was rich in divine glory and dignity, subsisting in the form of God, and yet counted not His equality with God a thing to be clutched and anxiously retained. For our sakes He was willing to take a place of subordination for a time, and to say, "My Father is greater than I." So He emptied Himself, not of divine being and perfections—for that could not be—but of the divine radiance and inapproachable majesty. He took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. He was not mere man; yet He was very man, being born of a woman; nay, more, as a man He humbled himself, and was even among the fisherman and peasants, who followed Him, "as one that serveth." He became obedient to God under the law, and so continued "until death." Death came to Him on the cross; and such was His mind that He would not save Himself and come down from the cross, but

* Acts xvi. 36-39.

looked on the things of others, and gave Himself for us an offering and sacrifice in lowliness and love.

On account of this, "God has highly exalted Him" in resurrection from the tomb, in ascension from the earth, and in session at His own right hand far above all heavens. God has also "given Him a name above every name." On earth He declared the Father's name, and now is His own name declared; nay, that very name Jesus, which was placed above the shameful cross, is destined to universal homage. Now is the Crucified One confessed as Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Such is the path which all Christian hearts are to trace; learning to follow Christ in His mind, to be lowly, self-sacrificing, patient for the good of others as He was, and so to prove "blameless and harmless children of God without blemish."

III. *The path of Christian attainment* (chap. iii.).—Warning the Philippians against those who would insist on circumcision in the flesh, which he calls "concision" or mutilation, St. Paul describes the true circumcision by spiritual marks. They who have it worship by the Spirit of God, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and, far from glorying in the flesh, put no confidence in it whatever.

On this last point the Apostle dwells, telling his own religious experience. He had fleshly grounds of confidence—

- (1.) Natal and hereditary, in his pure Hebrew extraction.
- (2.) Ritual, in his punctual circumcision.
- (3.) Orthodox, inasmuch as he was a Pharisee by education and choice, zealous for the traditions of his people, and blameless as touching legal righteousness.

Thus he had stood as high as any votaries of the concision could pretend to be, and higher than they; yet he had abandoned self-confidence altogether to cast himself down at Jesus' feet. In this mind he continued, after years of trial and toil, prizing above all things the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, and renouncing all grounds or pretexts for boasting in order to be found in Him, and to be wrapped round in the

righteousness of God by faith. He seeks a complete identification with Christ in the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, for such is the Divine order, that elevation in life and privilege should prepare for a descent into tribulation.* His thoughts even reach forward to the glorious reunion with Christ and the saints at the era of their resurrection of the just "from among the dead." He hopes to attain not merely to an *ἀνάστασις*, for a resurrection of the dead every one will see, but to an *ἐξανάστασις*, the eclectic resurrection of those who are Christ's, for they "shall rise first."

The things aimed at and hoped for with Pauline eagerness are not reached at a bound. There is a path of progress. Christian life begins in our being "apprehended by Christ." Its advancement is in growing likeness to Christ Jesus. It is a race in which one must always forget the past and "stretch out after the things in front." No otherwise can the prize of the calling on high be won, or the goal reached of a perfect conformity to Christ, involving unbroken and happy fellowship with Him.

The "perfected" are not here—they are with the Lord, waiting for the redemption of the body. But "the perfect" † are here, for by these are meant the more mature Christians, the grown up in contrast with those who are children and not men: and these perfect ones are admonished to show their ripeness of wisdom in a loving Christ-like walk. The Apostle had himself shown such an example to the Philippians; and, at a time when the New Testament Scriptures were only beginning to be written, when Christian morality was new, and the false teachers were "evil-workers," it was of great service to the Churches that St. Paul could say, "One and all of you imitate me," and that the converts who had not seen the Master, could study in the character and career of the servant the essential difference between an earthly and a heavenly walk.

* Compare chap. iii. 10. with Rom. v. 1-3.

† Chap. iii. 12, 15.

IV. *Exhortations to saints* (chap. iv.).—The Philippians, like the Thessalonians, are addressed as not only the Apostle's "joy," but his "crown." These Macedonian Churches formed chaplets or wreaths round his head, showing that he had not run in vain or laboured in vain. They are exhorted—

1. To steadfastness in the Lord; chap. iv. 1, reverting to i. 27, 30. With the most affectionate urgency does St. Paul insist on this abiding in Christ as the "blissful centre" of all religious thought and life. So he had written to the Thessalonians, "Now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord."

2. To unity in the Lord; chap. iv. 2, reverting to ii. 2, 14, 15. Euodia and Syntyche seem to have been Christian women of position and influence among the Philippian disciples. What set them at variance we know not; but the dissension between them was unhappy for the Church, as likely to engender a factious spirit: so the Apostle makes direct appeal to them to "mind the same thing in the Lord." He does not look into the dispute between them. Enough that it was not a matter for which the harmony of the Church should be broken. The thing which Euodia and Syntyche ought to mind was the lowliness of Christ Jesus (chap. ii. 3-5). Appeal also is made to Epaphroditus, under the designation "true yoke-fellow," to help the Christian workers at Philippi—both women and men. And all were to unite in the happy conciliation.

3. To joy in the Lord; chap. iv. 4, reverting to ii. 18, iii. 1. This Macedonian Church had endured a great trial of affliction, and was yet to have more suffering for Christ's sake. The more need for the saints to have the joy of the Lord for their strength. It was a good and healthy thing for them to rejoice greatly, and rejoice always in Christ. Yet in this joy must be no headiness or vainglory. It is a time for self-control in the presence of all men. "The Lord is at hand."

4. To devotion; chap. iv. 6, 7. "Have no anxieties, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." It is assumed that the saints have peace *with* God, as persons justified by faith. Now

comes an additional blessing upon them as they pray. "The peace of God"—a calmness truly divine—shall guard their hearts and thoughts in Jesus Christ.

5. To a thoughtful obedience; chap. iv. 8, 9. It is important to contemplate with steady purpose all forms and illustrations of moral beauty and excellence. The Philippians are in this way to strengthen their best aspirations and sympathies; and then, keeping before them the Apostle's teaching and example, they are to do the will of God. Here too there is great reward—nay, the greatest. Prayer with thanksgiving will bring to them "the peace of God." Obedience will bring to them "the God of peace."

The Epistle ends with frank and grateful acknowledgment of the kindness shown to St. Paul by the Philippians. They had done well to communicate with his affliction. He can never repay such friends in temporal things, nor do they at all desire it; but being poor, he makes many rich, for he conducts them to the bounty of God. "My God shall supply all your need, according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

After the doxology, a postscript is added to convey the greetings of Christians at Rome to those at Philippi. "The brethren who are with me greet you." These are the special friends and comrades of the Apostle who were in immediate communication with him. "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Cæsar's household." Such was the apostolic and original Church of Rome—"the brethren," and "all the saints." Still no sign whatever of a Pope, no trace of a hierarchy, and no dead saints, but living ones. A strange place Cæsar's household to hold some of those saints! They lived in the palace of the Emperor Nero, not far from that Pretorian camp in which the bonds of St. Paul were manifest.* The soldiers of the Pretorian guard knew the imprisoned Apostle well; and even some of the retainers of the cruel Emperor had been turned to the Lord. It was not required of them by Paul, nor did

* Chap. i. 13.

they feel bound in their own conscience to surrender their situations and withdraw from Nero's house. Better that they should shine as lights in that dark place, and walk as saints in Cæsar's palace.

Then a sentence of commendation to the grace of Christ concludes this holy and beautiful Epistle, which tells us how to live and how to die, how to renounce and how to attain, how to endure and how to rejoice. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."

COLOSSIANS.

THE Epistle to the Philippians has carried our thoughts into Macedonia in Europe. This recalls them to Asia Minor, Colosse or Colossæ being an ancient town of Phrygia, on the Lycus, within a few miles of Laodicea and Hierapolis. The Church there was not founded by St. Paul,—had never been visited by him. Epaphras, himself a Colossian, seems to have planted Christianity among his countrymen. Paul calls him his “dear fellow-servant;” and having during his first captivity at Rome heard the report of Epaphras concerning the condition and dangers of the Colossian Church, the Apostle wrote this letter to encourage the faithful, and to expose the errors, doctrinal and practical, which threatened to seduce the Church.

It resembles the Epistle to the Ephesians. It has the same doctrine of the mystery of God, the headship of Christ, and the contrast between the Old Man and the New; the same counsels for family life; and the same exhortations to sing praise, to pray, and to walk wisely, redeeming the time. Yet the Epistles are quite independent of each other; and this to the Colossians is chiefly distinguished by its clear and emphatic Christology. It is not the most fluent or elegant of St. Paul’s letters, but it is forcible and full of thought. It is decidedly polemical, like the Epistle to the Galatians, but combats a different class of errors. The Galatian Churches were infested with a Pharisaic or self-righteous spirit, fostered by Judaising teachers who gloried in circumcision and the Mosaic law. But the Phrygian Churches seem to have been very seriously tainted with a sort of semi-Jewish mysticism,—a combination of the Jewish

asceticism or Essenism with the beginnings of that Gnosticism which exercised such a fascinating and bewildering influence in the Post-Apostolic age. The former element in this compound led to rigorous prohibitions for curbing of the flesh, and in the end produced, as Ultraism always has done, a greater license. The latter element introduced a false cosmogony, and a worshipping of angels, with a mystic but most unreal wisdom.* Against all this mass of error St. Paul directs his vigorous polemic.

He begins in his usual manner with kind words and prayers, then inculcates and defends Christian doctrine, and proceeds to detailed exhortations and instructions for the Christian life. The transitions, however, are not abrupt. The letter passes from prayer to teaching, from teaching to remonstrance, and from remonstrance to practical counsel or kindly message, with the ease and swiftness of a strong current of thought.

After the salutation, in which we find that Paul associates with himself his trusty friend Timothy, the Epistle proceeds as follows:—

I. *Thanksgiving and prayer* (chap. i. 1-12).

1. In their thanksgiving to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Paul and Timothy put emphasis, as in other Epistles, on faith and love as the proofs of saintship. They had heard with joy from Epaphras of these evidences of spiritual life among the Colossians,—

(1.) Their “faith in Christ Jesus,” the prime distinction of Christians.

(2.) Their “love to all the saints,” and this for no earthly object, but “for the hope laid up for you in heaven.” It was “love in the Spirit;” and the faith, hope, and love abode together, as our Apostle had written to the Corinthians.

(3.) Their fruitfulness in the Gospel. This, which denotes righteous and useful living, is traced to divine truth received into the mind and heart. The word of the truth of the Gospel

* See Bishop Lightfoot on the *Colossian Heresy*, in Comm., p. 73, &c.

proved itself at Colosse, as everywhere, the incorruptible seed of holy and obedient lives in all those who cordially embraced it.

2. Having given thanks for the signs of grace which appeared at Colosse, the two servants of Christ prayed daily for the brethren in that city. Such was their high ideal of spiritual attainment, such their confidence in the Hearer of prayer, that, whenever they heard favourably of the Christian life of individuals or churches, they on that ground prayed the more earnestly for growth and progress. In this case they prayed that the Colossian saints might have—

(1.) Fulness of knowledge. They did know the Lord. The petition was that they might know more fully and thoroughly; and this not at second-hand, or by merely imbibing or copying the conceptions of other minds, but with a constant and genuine penetration,—“in all spiritual wisdom and intelligence.” So the true gnosis is set up against the false; nay, it is *epignosis*, advanced and thorough knowledge.

(2.) Holy consistency, expressed as walking up and down so as to please the Lord in doing His will, and bearing fruit in every good work; as in the work of faith, of patience, of liberality, of testimony. This, too, connects intimately with the epignosis, “increasing in the knowledge of God;” for while knowledge of His will should conduce to holiness, holiness by a reciprocal moral action conduces to more perfect knowledge of Himself.

(3.) The infusion of divine strength for the Christian walk and work, for growth and fruit-bearing. This dynamic grace is the secret of “patience and longsuffering with joyfulness,”—surely a touching and expressive description of the life of faith on earth. It is a sober suit in which that life is wrapped, but it has golden threads of hope and joy inwrought.

(4.) Fervent gratitude. This is the proper outlet for joyfulness, “giving thanks to the Father.” The position of sinful men is indicated as under the power of darkness; their inheritance is the blackness of darkness for ever. The position into

which the Father has brought the children of faith is one of blessed light in "the kingdom of the Son of His love." In light is found the sphere of their inheritance as saints; and thanks are ever due to the Father who has made them fit for the portion of this inheritance, and whose good pleasure it is to give them the kingdom.

Without even closing his sentence, the Apostle advances to what may be called—

II. The *Doctrine of the Epistle* (chap. i. 13-29).—St. Paul expatiates on the privileges and resources which the saints possess in Christ, the Son of God's love.

He, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, is the very Image of the Invisible God, or Personal Expression of God. Though He was manifested in the flesh, and took place among creatures, He is really the First-born, anterior to every creature; * nay, more, the Creator of all in heaven and in earth. By the Son, who is the Word of God, all things were made; and not only by Him, but in Him, through Him, and for Him. "He is before all things, and in Him all things cohere." Creation has in the Eternal Word its productive energy, its harmonising principle, and its final cause. Therefore it can never suffice to assign to our Lord a place however exalted among creatures, or to rank Him in a heavenly hierarchy. He is essentially and eternally divine.

At the 18th verse of the 1st chapter begins a declaration of Christ's glory in the Church. He is the Head of the Body, in a relation of vital union and authoritative direction to the whole Church of all times, and to every part of the Church in detail. The duty of the Church is to "hold the Head," *i.e.* to cleave to and obey Jesus Christ.

He is the Beginning or Source of the new creation, for He is the "First-begotten from among the dead." Thus He is twice called the *Prototokos*—(1.) Of, or anterior to, every creature; not one of the creatures, and therefore competent to

* See Lightfoot's admirable note in Comm.

be the Creator of all. (2.) From the dead, having been among them, and having risen; therefore competent to be the Author and Source of the Church, which has the secret of its life in the power of His resurrection.

In all this one Divine purpose reigns, that in all things the Son of God's love might become pre-eminent—might take and hold the first place or primacy. And this is the prominent thought in St. Paul's mind through the whole Epistle—the elevation, pre-eminence, and all-sufficiency of Christ. He dilates still further on the qualification of our Lord for this glorious supremacy. "All the fulness was pleased to dwell in Him." "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Deity bodily."* There seem to have been in the Colossian Church, even at this early period, speculations about a *pleroma* or plenitude of being, such as afterwards became so rife among the Gnostics. From this *pleroma* it was supposed that various beings and agencies issued intermediate between God and man. St. Paul condemns these speculations, by claiming for the eternal Son all the *pleroma*, the full aggregate of Divine qualities and energies. Nay, more; in Him was, and is, the true plenitude, not of Divine qualities merely, but of Deity—not *Theiotés*, but *Theotés*.† This doctrine of "the fulness," as taught by St. Paul, is no airy speculation, but a helpful, practical truth. "And ye are being filled up in Him who is the head of every principality and power."‡ There is therefore no need to worship angels, or to apply to inferior mediators. Christians ought not to go for help to any principality or power, for they are in Him who is the Life and Lord of all. They need not consult the esoteric wisdom of any school of *Gnosis*, for they are in Him "in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Nor is there any profit for them in submitting to the ordinances which belonged to a dispensation of imperfection. These are "a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ."

* Chap. i. 19; ii. 9.

† For the difference, see Trench, N. T. Synon., sec. 6.

‡ Chap. ii. 10.

Having carefully affirmed the personal and Divine pre-eminence of our Lord, the Apostle also inculcates the true doctrine of reconciliation through Him, as against the notion evidently propagated in Phrygia of partial reconciliations through angelic mediators. The teaching on this point closely corresponds with that which has been given in the Epistle to the Ephesians. The reconciliation extends to all things in earth and heaven, and issues in a new harmony of the universe. At present, it is extended to sinners of the Gentiles through the death of Christ. To preach this is the Apostle's joyful occupation. For this he puts aside all thought of his own comfort and ease, and is willing to endure any trials and sufferings in the footsteps of his Lord. Let the Phrygians boast if they will of their ancient mysteries. St. Paul has a nobler boast. He deals with a glorious mystery of God, which is no gloomy secret, but a truth brightly revealed—viz., "Christ in the Gentiles, the hope of glory." It is not merely the preaching of salvation to the Gentiles, for that was never hidden; but the reception of the Gentiles into the mystical Body of the Lord, and into the co-inheritance of glory. This, too, is only one stage toward the ultimate triumph of Divine power and grace—the recapitulation and reconciliation of all things to God in Christ. They who dealt with what the ancients called mysteries kept many of their disciples in a position of imperfect development, and admitted only a favoured few to a knowledge of their *arcana*. On the contrary, the Apostle, as a steward of the Christian mystery, proclaims his desire to "present every man complete"—*i.e.* thoroughly initiated, enlightened, and established in Christ Jesus.

On this doctrinal foundation rests all

III. *The exhortation to Christian life* (chap. ii.-iv. 6).

First, the position of men under grace is definitely stated. They have been circumcised with the circumcision made without hands—*i.e.* morally and spiritually cleansed and renewed. Their union with Christ is expressed in their baptism, wherein they renounce the heathen manner of life; and it is such a

union that they are not only slain and buried with Christ, but also raised up with Him through faith in the quickening operation of God.* This involves separation from sin in the new life to which they are pledged, and deliverance from the religion of mere ordinances, which has so great a hold on unregenerate men. The latter part of the second chapter is devoted to a vigorous protest against the imposition of ascetic restrictions, and the whole system of presumptuous speculation combined with specious humility, which was being pressed on the Christians at Colosse. Death with Christ (ver. 20) should be esteemed as separating for ever from the rudimentary directions and ordinances belonging to the world; and those who have passed through this great change should not allow their liberty to be over-ridden by precepts of austerity, which have no sanctifying power whatever, and "are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh." History has sadly confirmed this view of the tendency of the ascetic principle carried to extreme. From its false and unhealthy view of the inherence of evil in matter, and its confounding of "the flesh" with the body, it has led to the apparently opposite extreme of gross licentiousness. Nowhere has been seen such base morality, in easy alliance with fictitious piety, as in men and in sects that have proclaimed their contempt of the body as a dungeon of the spirit and a restraint on the free action of the soul.

According to St. Paul, the Christian life in man originates in resurrection with Christ, and is braced and purified by the consciousness of such resurrection. Since believers in Christ are, in a moral and spiritual sense, raised with Him, they are bound to seek the things which are above, and to mind those things rather than objects which are beneath. Duties on the earth are, of course, to be fulfilled, and the occupations of common life must be pursued; but the habitual preponderance of thought and affection is due to objects that are heavenly. The Christian is to be—not by fits and starts, but by habit and repute—con-

* Compare chapter ii. 11, 12, with Rom. iv. 24 vi., 3-6; Eph. i. 19, 20; 1 Pet. iii. 21, 22.

versant with heaven. His life is properly a heavenly life, "hid with Christ in God." It is only "members" that he has on the earth—not his life, and certainly not his treasure.

This position conferred on believers through grace is thus used as an argument for personal endeavours to be holy. Thus—(1.) Ye have died; "therefore put to death your members on the earth." Carry out the principle of the extinction of the life in sin, as respects your members in detail, the past instruments and servants of unrighteousness. (2.) Ye have put off the old man, and put on the new; therefore put on in detail the attributes of Christian character. These properties the Apostle enumerates, giving great prominence, as was his wont, to sweet and lowly virtues, and assigning the highest place to love as "the bond of perfectness."

Having admonished the Colossians further to let the peace of Christ be the supreme umpire in their hearts, and to have their minds imbued richly with His word, St. Paul proceeds to give directions for domestic virtue and happiness, quite similar to those contained in the Epistle to the Ephesians. Every relation of life is to be sanctified, and everything done "in the name of the Lord Jesus." Wives are to do what is fit in the Lord: children, what is well pleasing to the Lord: servants, to do their work as to the Lord: and masters, to bear in mind that they have a Lord or Master in heaven.

Three general exhortations are added:—

1. To prayer with thanksgiving (chap. iv. 2-4).—It should be persevering and persistent; "continue in prayer." It should be vigilant; "watching in the same." Long continuance in prayer might induce listlessness; therefore the hint to be alert and awake. It should also be thankful; "with thanksgiving;" an element in devotion, and an essential charm of Christian life, which St. Paul never forgets. Then, being well assured of the value of intercessory prayer offered by saints and faithful brethren, the Apostle says in behalf of himself and Timothy, "Withal praying also for us, that God may open to us a door for the Word." It is remarkable that St. Paul, though in

bonds, did not solicit prayer that he himself might be set free. The same Lord who sent His angel to liberate St. Peter from the prison at Jerusalem was able to deliver the Apostle of the Gentiles from His captivity at Rome. But St. Paul did not ask his friends to pray for this. His anxiety was for the opening of a door for the Word, that whether as prisoner or freeman, he might speak the mystery of Christ in the great city of Rome.

2. To wise walking, with redemption of the time (chap. iv. 5; comp. Eph. v. 15, 16).—Christians walk wisely, when they act with circumspection, looking well to the way that they take, so as to avoid those pits and ditches into which “a prating fool” will fall. They are to consider the influence of their example, not only on those within the Church, but on those without. Unbelievers observe closely, perhaps suspiciously, the behaviour of professed believers; and they will pay little heed to words, however wise, if unsupported in those who speak them by a discreet and upright walk. “Redeeming the time” always accompanies practical wisdom. It is meant, that a Christian should seize and use well every opportunity to do good, and to promote the glory of Christ.

3. To gracious speech (chap. iv. 6).—Though pious speech may be rejected as cant, when not sustained by corresponding conduct, it is when so supported a great instrument of good. Let it be “always with grace” as befits the utterance of men under grace; and let it be “seasoned with salt,” not dull, prosy, or insipid, but having point and pertinency so as to be relished and remembered. Old classic authors spoke of discourse as agreeably seasoned with salt when it was interspersed with witty sayings;* but too often the wit of the heathen degenerated into what St. Paul would regard as profane and indecent jesting.† It is a fine Christian accomplishment to have pithy and even witty speech, always well-toned, and guarded from any taint of grossness or irreverence.

IV. *Personal references, messages and salutations* (chap. iv.

* Cicero *de Orat.* i. 34.

† Ephes. v. 4.

7-18).—These are of great value in tracing the history and friendships of St. Paul, and some of them receive additional interest from the Epistle to Philemon, who was a Colossian. His runaway slave Onesimus is mentioned as a “faithful and beloved brother,” and his relative Archippus is admonished to look well to the ministry which he had received in the Lord. There occurs a kind notice of John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas. The Apostle had at one time been dissatisfied with him on a missionary journey; but the subsequent conduct of Mark had effaced any unfavourable recollection. Luke is mentioned affectionately; Demas coldly. Probably Paul already perceived in him a man not weaned from the world.

At the close the Apostle gives his own salutation in autograph. Perhaps, as he rose to do so, the clanking of his chain suggested to him to add, “remember my bonds.” But there is no more of this—no whining over his unhappy lot. His great heart yearned over the Church in the love of Christ; and he hastens to add, “The grace be with you!” The grace of the Head be with all the members; the grace of the Lord with all the servants! A sweet note on which to rest as the music of this profound Epistle dies away. They who love the Lord, and wish to do all things in His name, have daily need of grace; and the Lord has for them all the grace they need to guide, to support, to console, to purify.

“ I need Thy presence every passing hour.
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter’s power?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me !”

I. *THESSALONIANS.*

WITHOUT doubt this is the earliest of the extant writings of St. Paul, and indeed the first book in the New Testament in order of production. If not so indicative of intellectual power as some of the epistles that followed, it reveals as vividly as any of them the Apostle's generous and affectionate nature. It was he who, along with Silas and Timothy, first preached Jesus Christ in Thessalonica, and planted the Church there in the face of vehement opposition from the resident Jews. At that time the town was one of great importance in Macedonia; and, while the old cities of Ephesus and Colosse are now represented by mere heaps of ruins, Thessalonica exists at this day as the town of Saloniki, one of the chief places of European Turkey. A considerable proportion of the modern population are Jews.

The missionary visit of St. Paul to this Macedonian city was short, but the brethren there always retained a warm place in his heart. Persecution drove him to Berea, and thence by sea to Attica. At Athens he was soon rejoined by Timothy, who had remained in Macedonia. St. Paul sent him back to the Thessalonians, to "establish them and comfort them concerning the faith," while he himself went on to Corinth. At that city he spent a year and a half, during which period Timothy returned with a good account of the Thessalonian Church. This greatly cheered the Apostle, and led him to write the letter now before us, which is one not of argument, controversy, or reproof, but of confirmation and encouragement. "But now when Timothy came from you unto us, and brought

good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you : therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith : for now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord."

The Epistle is in two parts :—

I. The first comprises three chapters, and deals mainly in reminiscence of the past intercourse of St. Paul with the Thessalonians, and in joyful recognition of their steadfastness.

After salutation, the Apostle begins in his usual manner with thanksgiving to God. In this case he gave thanks that the Thessalonians possessed the essential elements of a strong Christian life, viz., faith, hope, and love ; each of these evinced appropriately, faith by its work, hope by its patience, love by its toil.

This life sprang from the reception of the Gospel. The Thessalonians had received the Word "in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost." A beautiful expression this, and one which in all ages has found illustrations in Christian experience. The Word is received into the heart in a time of trouble, and lo ! there is a joy in the Spirit that relieves the pain, and turns the water into wine.

The Thessalonian converts were chiefly Gentiles, and the effect of the Gospel testimony on them was that they "turned from idols to serve the living God, and to wait for His Son from heaven." It now gladdened the Apostle to know that this young Church showed a bright example to others. The word which the Thessalonians had embraced did not lie supine in their hearts, but sounded out from them again, corroborated and commended by them to all the regions of Macedonia and Achaia. They had begun well (1.) in the service of the living and true God, with renunciation of all idols ; (2.) in the hope of glory to be revealed at the second coming of the Lord ; (3.) in the knowledge of a perfect shelter from "the wrath to come," provided in Christ Jesus.

St. Paul reverts to the memorable days of his "entrance in" to Thessalonica with the Gospel of God, and of his loving and disinterested labours there. His anxiety had been to please not men, but the heart-searching God: and this raised him, as this only can raise any Christian preacher, not merely above the fear of man which brings a snare, but also above that hunger for praise which is ruinous to all simplicity of purpose, and all genuine dignity of character.

The Apostle can now rejoice in the fruit of his labour, but does so without any tinge of vainglory. Along with his friends Silas and Timothy, he gives thanks to God without ceasing for the success of the word which was preached. And over the converts at Thessalonica he rejoices with trembling. Their firmness is as life to him; and he feels that their apostasy would bring to him something like the bitterness of death. "Now we live if ye stand fast in the Lord." St. Paul had tenderly watched over the Thessalonians as a nurse or loving mother over little children; and if they should disappoint him, they would inflict on his faithful heart a cruel wound. There was cause, too, for anxiety. The disciples at Thessalonica were from the first exposed to persecution on account of their faith. The Apostle had stayed with them only for a few weeks, and after a little time Silas and Timothy had also left them. They were a congregation of young untried Christians, and even their elders could have had little experience. Nevertheless they had thus far stood firm in the Lord; and the tidings of their steadfastness regaled the spirit, and strengthened the life of the missionary Apostle. We are reminded of the fervent desires of Samuel Rutherford for his flock at Anwoth—"Oh how rich a prisoner were I, if I could obtain of my Lord the salvation of you all! What a prey had I gotten to have you all caught in Christ's net! My witness is above; your heaven would be two heavens, and the salvation of you all as two salvations to me."

While St. Paul is thus thankful for the fruit of his ministry,

he does not expect to see or enjoy all the result during his mortal life. He will wait for this till the day of Christ. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy." This faithful servant is well content to continue his labour, run his race, and endure affliction, waiting for his full reward till his Master shall come. Then will the saints of Macedonia be to him a chaplet of victory—his glory and his joy.

II. The second part occupies two chapters, deals with the future course of the Thessalonian Church, and blends exhortation and consolation beautifully together.

1. Be pure; chap. iv. 1-8. The morals of the Gentiles were shockingly corrupt, and what we call sins against the seventh commandment were scarcely considered disgraceful at that period. Those of the Gentiles who were received into the Church were in some danger of relapsing into old habits; and the whole tone of Christian life was apt to be injured by the dissolute manners of surrounding society. Therefore this prominent warning against sensuality.

2. Be industrious; chap. iv. 9-12. It is finely said, that there is no need to write to the Thessalonians concerning brotherly love, but they are exhorted to grow therein and to be diligent and honest in all their affairs. No doubt some of the Thessalonian converts had lost their livelihood on account of their new faith; others, excited by their new position, by their sufferings for Christ, and by the hope of His speedy advent, may have become negligent in business, and given up steady work for daily subsistence. The Apostle, therefore, with that practical sagacity which his enthusiasm never clouded, warns them not to become burdensome to others, but to maintain a proper independence. "Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and may

have lack of nothing." Mendicant friars would have found little favour with St. Paul.

3. Be comforted concerning the departed; chap. iv. 13-18. The Thessalonian Christians dwelt much in thought on the second coming of Christ, and were probably in daily expectation of that event. They therefore grieved much over any of their number who died without seeing the Lord, having an impression that such persons would be excluded from the glory about to be revealed. It was a point on which they had not been instructed, and the result of their mistake was that they sorrowed over their dead as the heathen did who had no hope. This misconception, therefore, the Apostle corrects. We find his very words used three hundred years thereafter by John Chrysostom in one of his finest sermons, with a view to repress excessive grief at the death of Christian friends. "You may grieve and weep; but give not way to despondency, nor indulge in complaints. Believe me, I am ashamed and blush to see unbecoming groups of women pass along the market-place, tearing their hair, cutting their arms and cheeks, and all this under the eyes of the (Heathen) Greeks. For what will they not say? Will they not mutter concerning us, 'Are these the people who philosophise about a resurrection? Indeed! How poorly their actions agree with their opinions!' We ought to thank God not only for the resurrection, but also for the hope of it, which can comfort the afflicted soul, and bid us be of good cheer concerning the departed, for they will again rise and be with us. If we must have anguish, we should mourn and lament over those who are living in sin, not over those who have died righteously."

Mark well the consideration with which St. Paul comforts mourners. He says nothing of a priestly prerogative to deliver them from purgatory, or of the efficacy of masses said for the repose of the dead. Such fictions were unknown to apostles. Nor does he try to stanch grief with commonplace reflections on the inevitableness of death, with affirmation of the immortality

of the soul, or even with assurances that the bereaved will soon rejoin their departed friends in heaven. Such are the consolations often administered to mourners now-a-days; but St. Paul deals in none of them. His doctrine for comfort is, that the saints who sleep in Jesus will return with Him, and be in the glory at His appearing. Far from losing anything by having died, they shall rise first. Then there shall be joined to them the generation of Christians on the earth, transfigured into the likeness of Christ, and caught up in the cloud to meet Him. Thenceforward the whole assembly of the saints shall be for ever with the Lord.

Such is the hope of Christians, and their consolation regarding the departed. Death is a mere parenthesis—a sleep for a season. There may be great individual blessedness, but there is no saintly gathering at death. We must look beyond. The consummation, as of the apostolic joy, so also of the happiness of reunited saints, cannot be till the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

4. Be vigilant; chap. v. 1–10. Times and seasons connected with the Lord's coming are not to be chronologically fixed by any of His followers, for the Father has reserved them in His own power. But this the saints at Thessalonica knew perfectly, for it was among the first principles of Christian truth, that the day of the Lord will come on a world at ease and unprepared, as a thief comes unexpectedly in the night. The men of the world will not recognise the sign of His approach, and therefore will incur a sudden destruction. But the day of the Lord will not so come on His people. Whatever gloom may gather on the world, the followers of Jesus are not of the night or of darkness. They are not to "sleep" as other men, but to "watch and be sober." They must be awake, alert, and of good courage, armed as is needful in this time of patience, while they wait for the Lord, "having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation."

5. Be orderly, and helpful to each other; chap. v. 11–15.

Here are valuable directions for the collective life and internal peace of the Church. It is a brotherly society, in which every one is so far his brother's keeper that he is to seek his brother's welfare. Kindness, consideration, patience, are to mark the intercourse of Christians. Special respect also is due to those who preside over the congregation. While there is no sanction for the Church tyranny which treats the redeemed people of Christ as a helpless laity, dependent on and subject to a priesthood, there is clear authority for so much superintendence as will protect the Church from individual caprice and popular disorder. Neither the title of *Presbyter* nor that of *Bishop* is found in this Epistle. But the class of officers who bore these titles in the primitive Christian Church is evidently indicated by the words, "Them that labour among you, and are presiding over you in the Lord, and admonish you."

6. A group of brief counsels which deserve minute attention ; chap. v. 16-24.

"Rejoice evermore." This is the inspiring watchword of St. Paul to the afflicted Macedonian Churches. So we find it in Phil. iii. 1, iv. 4.

"Pray without ceasing." This of course does not exact incessant efforts of conscious prayer, but requires a devotional habit or bent of mind. And it means to persist in prayer, whatever our hindrances, misgivings, or discouragements,—to continue in supplication for a definite object till it is reached, or the will of God regarding it is sufficiently ascertained.

"In everything give thanks." A duty this which St. Paul never forgets, and which he considers no mere optional exercise. It is of obligation, because it is God's will concerning us in Christ Jesus.

"Quench not the Spirit." There is a holy fire kindled in Christian hearts ; but restraint of prayer or neglect of thanksgiving, hindering the operation of the Spirit, tends to extinguish that fire from heaven. One may put out a fire by pouring water on it ; or one may simply let it go out by neglecting it—

neither feeding nor stirring it when it is low. The Apostle warns the Thessalonians not to quench the fire of the Spirit, either by the water of discouragement, or by the negligence of a prayerless, thankless mind, implying that they were responsible for cherishing and stirring the fire in their own hearts. The next sentence indicates that the caution is also directed against the suppression of spiritual gifts in the Church.

“Despise not prophesyings.” These were utterances in the Spirit, more direct than the ordinary tenor of teaching, and directed to the edification of the Church. The Corinthians did not give due place to prophesying, preferring the more showy gift of tongues; and this Apostle wrote to correct their ill-judged preference. “Covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.” He is anxious that the Thessalonians should not fall into the same mistake. He wishes them not to make light of prophesyings, for these tended to “edification, exhortation, and comfort.”

“But prove all things: hold fast that which is good.” Not to despise does not mean to receive with a blind, unreasoning credence. The saints are to cultivate a spiritual discernment or judgment, and to exercise it under a grave responsibility. If any speak with tongues, there is to be interpretation of tongues; if any bring a doctrine, there is to be a trial of the spirits; if prophets speak, hearers are to judge. This, too, not to encourage interminable controversy and loose thinking in the Church, but in order to “hold fast that which is good.”

“Abstain from every kind of evil.” In order to hold fast the good, it is necessary to hold no evil in any of its forms. It may array itself in a form of godliness, “for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light;” but it should be detected, unveiled, and utterly rejected.

“And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly.” It is the God of peace who, having reconciled a people to Himself, purifies them for His service. It is the God of peace who will bruise Satan under their feet. In another Epistle we read:

“The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight.* In the divine sanctification the whole man is embraced. As every part of a redeemed man is separated to God by the consecrating blood of Christ, so every part is cleansed and renewed by the indwelling Spirit of Christ. In the order of sanctification the spirit of a man is first named, because the Spirit of the Lord dwells in and associates Himself with our spirit. From that shrine the Divine Spirit propagates His influence through the entire constitution of man. The God of peace purifies the soul and controls the life-movements of desire. Then the good work extends to the physical frame. The body being redeemed, is also sanctified, and its members are yielded as instruments of righteousness unto God.

Thus the saints are to be “preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” When they stand before Him at His advent, they will not be impalpable shades, but appear as complete men, having spirit, soul, and body. Spirit, however, will predominate to a degree that is now impossible, for the body itself in the resurrection state will be spiritual, and will with unflagging energy sustain the untiring soul and spirit in the service of the Lord.

“Alas!” one cries who feels himself hard pressed in the conflict with evil, “this perfect sanctification will never be fulfilled in me.” Nay, but be of better cheer. There is Another and Greater than you interested and engaged in this. “Faithful is He who calleth you; who also will do it.”

With a few words of salutation and benediction, the Epistle concludes. Its distinctive features are easily remembered. Addressed to a people who had recently received the Gospel, it recognises their freshness of life and ardour of hope. It is, therefore, a book well suited at all times to young Christians. It furnishes tests of conversion, corrects errors of inexperience, warns against vain security, and conveys in a most compact

* Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

form wise counsels for the Christian life. It gives prominence to that which should always stand before the minds of disciples young and old—the coming of the Lord from heaven. In every respect it is an Epistle worthy to “be read unto all the holy brethren.”

II. THESSALONIANS.

THE occasion and the drift of this letter are obvious enough. It is a sequel to the previous Epistle, and probably followed it in course of a few months. It issues from the same persons, Paul, Silas, and Timothy; and the joint origin is expressed throughout the Epistle more than in any other of the apostolic letters. Thus it is written: "We are bound to thank God;" "we glory in you;" "we pray always for you;" "we beseech you, brethren;" "pray for us, that we may be delivered;" "we have confidence in the Lord;" "we commend you, brethren;" "we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you." Only once the individuality of St. Paul breaks out, "Remember ye not, that when I was yet with you, I told you these things?" At the end he gives his autograph salutation, which was a guarantee of genuineness in every letter.

The objects which Paul, Silas, and Timothy had in view in writing, were plainly these two; (1.) To correct misconstructions of what they had taught, both orally and in their first Epistle, regarding the second coming of Christ. (2). To repeat and enforce the exhortations of that Epistle to patience, industry, and good order in the Church. The tone of the letter is not so buoyant as that of the first; but it is conceived and expressed with the same tender affection, as of a father charging, and a nurse cherishing her children.

The chapters in this book are sufficiently well arranged; but we prefer to be guided by the two objects in view as already indicated.

I. *Correction of misconception and mistake regarding the coming of the Lord* (chaps. i. ii.).

From the first, the Church in Thessalonica had been much persecuted and afflicted. Those Jews who obeyed not the Gospel, stirred up the heathen Gentiles of the city and neighbourhood to oppress the Christians. The missionaries, Paul, Silas, and Timothy, escaped their malice; but all the more vehemently did the persecution rage against the new community of apparently defenceless Christian brethren. Now those brethren had heard the Apostle and his companions speak of a great day of the Lord; and in the first Epistle they were told of the suddenness with which that day of the Lord should come. Doubtless they had also learned from prophetic scripture, for those of them who were Jews and proselytes were acquainted with the Greek version of the Old Testament, that the day of the Lord would be one of wrath and woe, a terrible ordeal, a time when all hands shall be faint, and every heart shall melt. It seemed to them in their simplicity, that this day of the Lord had come, for it was a time of tribulation and anguish. They knew that Christ Himself had not yet appeared, but they surmised that the day of the Lord had "set in;" and they were shaken in mind by the thought.

To remove this mistake, two explanations are given:—

1. It could not be the day of the Lord, because He will come to give not trouble, but rest to His Church, and tribulation to His and her enemies. It is true that He will judge His people with equity, but in the sense of vindicating them from reproach, and defending their cause. They are not to suffer at His coming, but to rest from all suffering, to glorify their Deliverer, and be glorified in and with Him. But woe to the troublers of His people in the day when He shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels! To them he will recompense tribulation, and punish them with everlasting destruction.

The fact that the Thessalonians were in tribulation, ought to have proved to them that the day of the Lord had not set in. They were evidently in the day of the patience of Christ, and

not in the day of His judgment. Therefore they should continue in the meekness and obedience of faith, looking to their Lord, and waiting for Him without agitation or alarm.

This part of the Epistle concludes with a beautiful prayer put up by the three missionaries, at Corinth, for the Thessalonian converts. "We pray always for you, that our God may count you worthy of the calling, and fulfil every good pleasure of goodness and work of faith, with power; that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." * That God would count the Thessalonians worthy of the holy calling, or worthy of the kingdom of God (ver. 5), cannot mean that He would reckon them to have earned or deserved it, for such merit would nullify the doctrine of grace. It must mean, that He would mould their dispositions into harmony with their calling, and prepare them for His kingdom and glory. And how? By filling them with all goodness, such as is well pleasing in His sight, and inspiring their faith with augmented energy. Then glory at the appointed era, the coming of the Lord. He is now glorified on the earth in the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit, and glorified in heaven by and with the Father. But at His second advent, He will be glorified in His saints; and they will be taken up into the glory with Him.

2. It could not be the day of the Lord, for certain events which had not yet come to pass must precede the advent. There must first be "the apostasy;" and out of the apostasy would issue an opponent of God and of Christ, who must reveal his proud and lawless nature, and then be destroyed "by the epiphany of the Lord's coming."

The passage in which this is set forth is perhaps more difficult of interpretation than any other in the apostolic letters, epitomising as it does, in a few sentences, the working of evil in the Church through many centuries till the advent of Christ. It is likely that Paul, Silas, and Timothy themselves had but a dim

* Chap. i. 11, 12.

foresight of the things signified in their prophetic words, and had no idea whatever of the time which should elapse before all should be fulfilled.

The first part of the prediction is plain enough. The shadows of apostasy began very early to fall on the Church. Germs of error were soon mixed with the good seed of truth. A haughty spirit crept into the Christian Presbyterate. The Church which everywhere had begun with a chaste "simplicity toward Christ,"* fell away from her first love and singleness of heart. Simplicity of faith was in course of time corrupted by Gnostic speculations, and credulous traditions: simplicity of worship by externalism and ritualism: simplicity of order by hierarchy culminating in Popery. A mystery of lawlessness—not necessarily rejecting all law, and therefore anarchic, but rejecting the law of the Lord—was already at work even in the days of the Apostles; and they foreknew that in after times "many would apostatise from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits." This is a most important fact in view of the history of doctrine and worship. It is assumed by those who adhere to the superstitions of the Latin Church, that because the Holy Ghost descended to abide in the Church which the apostles founded, a divine authority and value must attach to everything that has descended to us as the belief or practice of the great mass of professed Christians. Not so; for the apostles themselves predicted "the falling away," and we have to take good heed lest things be palmed on us as of catholic and heavenly authority, which are the mere remnants or dregs of that great apostasy.

The interpretation of this prophecy becomes more arduous as we advance. Out of the Apostasy is to be produced and unveiled, at a time undetermined, the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition, the Lawless One, or quintessence of the whole mystery of lawlessness. This is not to be explained of the false Christs—those pseudo-Messiahs of the early ages, who led away none but Jews after them. Nor is it to be referred to the many Antichrists spoken of by St. John,—teachers of error regarding

* 2 Cor. xi. 3.

the person of the Lord, asserting that Christ had not come in the flesh. To the Oriental Church, Mohammed, when he arose, seemed to be this Man of Sin. From the eleventh century, as the Papacy reached its grand climacteric, some surmised that this was no other than the pope; and the Protestant Churches at the Reformation generally accepted this view. On the contrary, Popish controversialists have found in this passage Luther and Protestantism.

Certain features of the Man of Sin are undoubtedly exhibited in the Roman Papacy—especially the overweening pretension and arrogance. But in other points the correspondence is not at all so obvious. We read of “the coming” (*παρουσία*) of the Man of Sin,—an expression which can scarcely be applied to the rise of the Papacy. Then the description is of one who is audacious in impiety, exalting himself above every one called God, or that is an object of worship, and exhibiting himself “that he is God.” This does not suggest to our minds a high priest of superstition, such as the Pope of Rome. And we can scarcely say that the Man of Sin, as God sitting in the temple of God, means the pope seated on high at a great festival in St. Peter’s, unless we are prepared to admit that the Basilica of the Vatican is the temple of God. In fact, nothing has occurred in the history of Christianity adequate to the fulfilment of this oracle; and therefore we fear that a terrible impersonation of arrogant impiety is yet to be revealed.

The meaning attached to the Lawless One must govern the interpretation of “the thing which hinders” his manifestation. The fathers seem to have understood the phrase as an allusion to the Roman imperial Government. But the solution of the whole passage must probably wait the further development of events. Its use is to warn us that the opposition to God and to Christ has not yet come to its worst on the earth. There is yet to be revealed the climax of human pride and wilfulness, aided by the working of Satan; but its doom is also written. The Lord Jesus “shall slay that Lawless One with the breath

of His mouth, and destroy him by the manifestation of His coming.”

Meantime, the mystery of lawlessness works on in opposition to “the mystery of godliness;” and the only security against its wiles and the strong delusion in which its victims are bound, lies in personal belief and experience of the truth as it is in Jesus. “We are bound to give thanks to God alway for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, that God chose you from the beginning to salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Learning, talent, fervour, laboriousness—none of them will protect from strong delusions in religion. Nothing preserves but union to Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit through belief of the Gospel. Brethren so established will stand fast in the faith, and hold fast the apostolic instructions.

This part of the Epistle, like the preceding, ends with a loving, consolatory prayer—all the more welcome after the unveiling of such an ominous future. “Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, who loved us, and gave us eternal consolation and good hope in grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish them in every good work and word.”*

II. *Repetition and enforcement of practical admonitions* (chap. iii.).

The writers of the Epistle express their supreme confidence in the Lord as establishing and guarding the converts at Thessalonica, and rely on their obedience. Then they again pray for them: “The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and the patience of Christ.”† It is not “the patient waiting for Christ,” as in the Authorised Version, though that is good; but it is sympathy with the very patience of Christ, who during this time of opposition to His word—when His cause is obstructed by “unreasonable and wicked men,”—has long patience, and sits calmly in heaven expecting till His enemies

* Chap. ii. 16, 17.

† Chap. iii. 5.

are made His footstool. This patience His people are to share, that they may also have part in His victory.

The expressions, "the Lord," "the Lord Jesus," "our Lord Jesus Christ," are peculiarly frequent and emphatic in this short Epistle. In the Lord's faithfulness, the Thessalonian converts are safe. In His name, they are to be obedient to the injunctions of Paul, Silas, and Timothy, and evince their opposition to the spirit of lawlessness. If a brother shows himself unruly and self-willed, they are to break fellowship with him. Yet the great principle of Church discipline is to be remembered—that it is for correction, not for vengeance or punishment: "Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

With that broad, practical sense which should never be forgotten in religious instruction, the writers renew their admonition to the Thessalonians regarding honest, self-supporting industry. Probably it was an effect of the agitation among them about the day of the Lord, that some of the Christians had renounced daily work, and were living in a feverish anxiety or excitement. Those who did so burdened unduly the funds of the Church, or lived at the expense of others; so the Epistle conveys to them a very terse injunction, "that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread."

How often have we seen men, of little force of mind or character, caught by some wind of religious enthusiasm, hasten to put away their business, abandon their profession or trade, and set forth to preach, to open mission halls, and advertise evangelistic addresses, and plunge into expensive enterprises on what they call "faith!" It amounts to this, that they expect their fellow-Christians to work and support them, though those brethren were never consulted as to their fitness for the public position they have assumed. The results are very unsatisfactory. Incapable men assume places of observation, and meddle with the things of Christ and the Church at their own instance; a disorderly aspect is given to religious society; and Christian people are subjected to an incessant din for money,

in order to sustain men who ought never to have left their ordinary callings. If one be duly called and appointed to undertake such work in the Church as demands all his time and strength, he is entitled to a livelihood for himself and his family—he may “live of the Gospel.” But persons not so called and appointed have no right to place themselves on Church support, and call it “living by faith.” Scandal would be avoided, and purity of motive placed beyond question, if such persons would “with quietness work, and eat their own bread.”

In unsettled times unstable men run to and fro, and innumerable self-made ministers and missionaries press themselves and their projects on public attention and support. One sets up his mission here, another his hall there, a third opens a tabernacle for divine worship and service of his own accord, just as he might open a shop. Then almost every one prints and circulates his report, tells how many sinners he is saving, and concludes with a list of kind donations. It may be all well meant, but it is a system of confusion, and not without elements of serious danger. There is no intelligent combination of Christian work; there is no proper superintendence of workers, or sufficient guarantee for their life and doctrine: and withal, there is, on account of the desultory and fussy character of these efforts, an extravagant waste of Christian resources.

By all means let faith grow exceedingly, and let charity abound. But let this disorderliness be discouraged. “The Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in all ways.” * Now, peace is to be kept by the observance of God’s own order in the Church, by a modest reluctance to be chargeable to our brethren, unless they duly call us, or the Master, by special indication which the brethren recognise, appoint us to public work, and by that quietness of spirit which has far more effect in commending the Gospel than ever so much religious forwardness. In fact, there is nothing better as a corrective of the unseemliness to which we allude, than to recall the following

passage from the first Epistle to the Thessalonians,—“Comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also you do. And we beseech you, brethren, to know those who labour among you, and are presiding over you in the Lord, and admonish you ; and to esteem them very highly in love for their works’ sake. Be at peace among yourselves.” *

* 1 Thess. v. 11-13.

I. TIMOTHY.

WE now reach a group of three letters by St. Paul, commonly called the Pastoral Epistles. They are addressed to Timothy and Titus, his companions in travel and labour, and are expressed at once with the ease of a familiar friend, and with the ripe wisdom of a father in Christ.

No name is more closely connected with St. Paul's career than that of Timothy, a native of Lystra, a town not very remote from the Apostle's birthplace at Tarsus. Though his father was a Greek and a heathen, his mother and grandmother were devout Jewesses, and trained him from childhood in a knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. He was converted to Christ through the preaching of St. Paul, on his first visit to Lycaonia, and was, no doubt, baptized at the same time. On his second visit to the district, the Apostle took special notice of Timothy as "a disciple well reported of by the brethren at Lystra and Iconium," and adopted him as his missionary assistant. Nay more, he even circumcised him, out of deference to the Jews, that his usefulness might not be prejudiced on account of his semi-Greek extraction, and that he might obtain free admission into synagogues. Thereafter the young missionary was ordained by "the laying on of the hands of the presbytery," St. Paul himself being present, and laying on hands along with the presbyters; but the place at which this was done is not mentioned, nor is it said whether this was Timothy's introduction to office in the Church, or his destination to a particular work, as Saul and Barnabas had been destined to their missionary expedition by the laying on of the hands of prophets and teachers at Antioch.

From that time Timothy enjoyed intimate companionship with St. Paul; and, being employed by him on special missions of importance and difficulty, justified the confidence which the Apostle had reposed in him.* It does not appear that he was a man of commanding ability or overwhelming eloquence. He was not fitted for a position of first consequence in the Church; and if we may judge from the repeated and urgent exhortations to courage and vigilance which are addressed to him, may have been naturally of a gentle and even somewhat irresolute disposition; but Timothy had noble qualities of piety and faithful affection; and that man must ever be honoured in the Church of God who, for full sixteen years, possessed the love, deserved the confidence, shared the labours, and alleviated the sorrows of the great Apostle Paul.

Without doubt it was near the end of St. Paul's life and ministry that he wrote the Pastoral Epistles. After his first imprisonment at Rome, during which he despatched his letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon, he resumed his itinerant ministry for a few years, revisiting former scenes, and perhaps entered on some new ground also. On this apostolic circuit he left Timothy at Ephesus, and Titus at Crete, to represent his authority, and establish order in the Churches.

The letter before us was sent to Timothy while thus acting as an apostolic delegate. It begins with a formal statement of the apostleship of St. Paul, not as though Timothy could doubt it, but because the letter was intended to sustain the position and authority of the Apostle's messenger. We may best apprehend the scope of the Epistle, and recollect its contents if we regard it as an apostolic charge to an apostolic commissary. The charge may be said to concern these four matters, *Doctrine, Public Prayer, Ministry, Management of the Christian community.*

I. *Doctrine* (chap. i. 3-20).—Timothy himself was well

* Phil. ii. 19-23.

grounded in the truth, but many who obtained an audience in the congregations of the period were not so ; and the Apostle bids his friend protect the Church at Ephesus from those who disseminated Jewish traditions of fables, allegories, endless genealogies, and the like, which were all connected with perversions and misuses of the law, and tended to promote disputes, not "the dispensation of God which is in faith."

"The law is good if used lawfully." It is well used to deter and restrain the vicious, but ill-used to excite disputation, or feed self-righteousness. God in this dispensation is made known as "the Saviour-God ;" and the commandment or charge given by Him to ministers of the New Testament has for its great aim "love out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned." In opposition to those "who desired to be teachers of the law," St. Paul describes the truth committed to his trust as the "Gospel of the glory of the blessed God."

In fact the beginning of this letter is not unlike that of the Epistle to the Galatians. Here, as there, the Apostle asserts his Gospel against all the perversions and confusions of the teachers of legalism ; and then proceeds to state in what manner he had been entrusted with that Gospel. But in this letter his tone is more gentle than in the other. He recalls with grief his early zeal against the Church, and extols the grace which had saved him, and put him into the ministry.

Now as a father he charges his son Timothy to be faithful in the New Testament ministry ; and closes this part of the Epistle by a warning allusion to certain men who had "made shipwreck concerning the faith." Two of these he mentions by name—Hymenæus and Alexander—whom he had been obliged to excommunicate. He uses the strong expression "whom I delivered unto Satan," *i.e.*, he had excluded them from the Church which is under Christ, and so replaced them in the world which is under Satan, that they might be corrected and healed by the discipline, and "learn not to blaspheme." From this is plainly to be inferred, though some

have denied it, that men may be justly excommunicated for false doctrine, as well as for bad morals.

II. *Public Prayer* (chap. ii.).—Concerning this it is taught—

1. That it should have a large scope, and cover the interests of all mankind. Special emphasis is laid on the duty of intercession in behalf of the kings of the earth, for whom, while they were heathen and hostile to the Gospel, the early Christians may have hesitated to pray. There must be no narrowness in the spirit of the praying assembly. God cares for all men; Christ is provided for all men. Therefore let the prayer of the Church ascend to God through Christ in behalf of "all men."

2. That it should be offered with due decorum. Prayer was to be made in every place by the men "lifting up holy hands without wrath and disputing." Obviously there was to be much freedom in public prayer, but all the more need of a guarded reverence, and a careful avoidance of contention and disorder. We are reminded of the well-known words of Jeremy Taylor, "Prayer is the issue of a quiet mind: 'tis the daughter of charity and the sister of meekness; and he that prays to God with an angry, troubled, and discomposed spirit, is like one that retires into a battle to meditate, and sets up his closet in the outquarters of an army."

Another point of necessary decorum relates to the bearing of women in the assembly. They were not at liberty to take the same public part in prayer as the men; though this rule was not to be interpreted as an absolute forbiddal to let their voices be heard, for there is a passage in a previous Epistle which implies that a woman duly qualified might pray or prophesy in the assemblies of the saints, only with covered head.* And the stress in the passage now before us is laid on the duty of the Christian women to attire themselves modestly, so as not to attract attention to themselves in the

* 1 Cor. xi. 5-15.

congregation, but in a gentle and inobtrusive spirit to devote themselves to good works.

Whatever might be allowed in regard to prophecy and prayer, the rule is absolute that a woman may not teach or rule in the Church. Of course she may preach or publish the Gospel to "them that are without," under those conditions of feminine propriety which nature itself suggests: she may also teach her own sex and have authority over them and over children; but she may not teach publicly in the assembly of saints, or "usurp authority over the man."

St. Paul supports this position by a sudden reference to the origin of our race. The man was first formed, then the woman to be his help-meet. The woman, not respecting the headship which the Creator had placed in the man, acted for herself, and so was deceived. The man was not deceived, but fell through compliance with the wish of her whom he ought to have guided and controlled. Nevertheless, salvation for the woman, and for the man also, is "through her childbearing," *i.e.* through that seed of the woman, the Child of the Virgin, who has bruised the serpent's head.

III. *Official Ministry* (chaps. iii. iv.).—Two orders of official ministers are recognised—bishops and deacons. Timothy needed not to institute these, for there were bishops at Ephesus several years before St. Paul left him there. When the Apostle was on his voyage to Jerusalem, the elders of the Ephesian Church met him at Miletus, and were addressed by him as those whom "the Holy Ghost had made bishops." There can be no doubt that a Church so well organised had deacons also.

The superintending officers of the Church were bishops or overseers. Every well-ordered congregation in primitive times had its presbyter-bishops, ruling in love. The Apostle does not, in this Epistle, lay down the authority for such an episcopate; he refers to it as an office well known, and says that whoso aspires to it, "desires a good work." But let such

aspirant give heed to the qualifications requisite. He "must be blameless, husband of one wife (not having two or more wives living),* sober, discreet, orderly, hospitable, apt to teach, not given to wine, not a striker,† but mild, averse to fighting, void of avarice, ruling well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; not a neophyte." It will be observed that all the requirements, with the single exception of aptness to teach, are moral qualities, giving authority of character, and commanding respect. The bishop might or might not have much intellectual power; but it was essential that he should have moral weight, enjoy a good reputation in society, and show the Christian people how they too ought to behave themselves in the Church of God.

The second order of Church officers is that of deacons, who are appointed, not for general oversight, but for kindly service and the practical details of administration. Those also are required to have a grave, unblemished, and unselfish character, it being essential to their usefulness that they should enjoy the respect and confidence of their brethren. Notice is also taken of the qualities which the wives of the deacons ought to possess. Of the wives of the elders nothing is said, because those officers exercise authority which women may not share. But deacons are occupied with matters of detail in gathering the offerings of the Christian people and caring for the Church poor; and in such work their wives may be helpful or hurtful according to the measure of their discretion. There were in primitive times deaconesses, a female order which may with great advantage be revived; whereas there never were elderesses, or bishopesses, because functions of church government may not

* "In the corrupt facility of divorce allowed both by Greek and Roman law, it was very common for man and wife to separate, and marry other parties during the life of one another. Thus a man might have three or four living wives. We believe it is this kind of *successive* polygamy, rather than *simultaneous* polygamy, which is here spoken of as disqualifying for the presbyterate."—*Conybeare in loc.* See a good discussion of this regulation in Fairbairn on the Pastoral Epistles, Appendix B.

† The clause, "not greedy of filthy lucre," appears to be an interpolation.

be put into female hands ; the woman may not “ usurp authority over the man.” To restore and reorganise the ministry of woman in the Church is one of the pressing duties of our time ; but to place female pastors in charge of congregations, as has been done by some eccentric people in America, is to transgress all propriety, and to contradict the plainest instructions of Holy Writ.

The fourth chapter conveys a warning of dangers to come, well fitted to quicken the vigilance of the bishops and deacons. The Church of the living God, “ the pillar and ground of the truth,” was to be assailed by pernicious errors : the mystery of godliness to be opposed by “ seducing spirits, and demoniac teachings.” St. Paul had told the Ephesian elders at Miletus that, after his departure, grievous wolves would ravage the flock, and perverse teachers should arise from among themselves. In this letter he returns to the same subject, and intimates, as by express revelation of the Spirit, “ that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith.” Timothy therefore was to be on his guard, and to put the brethren on their guard against ascetical teachings suggested by seducing spirits, which induced apostasy from the grace of God and from the purity which is in Christ.

IV. *Management of the Christian community* (chaps. v., vi.).

1. Of the elders. The qualifications of the elders as bishops have been already described : now the Apostle speaks of the deference with which they should be treated. Timothy himself was not to rebuke one of them ; and he might not receive an accusation against an elder, except before witnesses, that the character and influence of a ruler in the Church might not be whispered away.

Much controversy has revolved round the following words : “ Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and teaching.”* The question is whether this sentence sanctions lay-elders (so

* Chap. v. 17.

called) to rule, and a clerical elder for preaching and teaching. It seems to us that to found on these words a separation of elders into two entirely different classes, is to put more strain on the sentence than it will fairly bear. The distinctive function of all the elders in any congregation is to rule in truth and love, to superintend and supervise the flock. In the discharge of this duty, they are to teach, and so "feed the flock" according to their opportunity and ability. But it is in harmony both with Scripture and with common sense, and it is found in practice most expedient, that one of the elders, by natural adaptation, by special training, and by spiritual endowment more fitted than others to teach, should be charged with the public instruction of the people, and occupy the Christian pulpit.

2. Of godly women. "Entreat the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity. Honour widows that are widows indeed." How different this advice from the tyranny of the secret confessional, at which the priest questions a woman at his pleasure, and compels her to disclose to him every secret of her mind! How different too from that false ideal of a religious life which forbids marriage and imposes on the young cruel and unnatural vows, is the language of this wise Apostle! He assumes that religious women may marry; he expresses a wish that the younger women should marry. There is not even any objection to a widow marrying again. All that is reproved in this passage is the conduct of a widow who, professing to be weaned from all earthly pleasure, had devoted herself to the service of the Church, and afterwards returned to the world in a second marriage. To prevent the scandal of such cases, it is directed that none should be enrolled among the Church widows under the age of sixty years.

3. Of public rebuke. This duty is to be performed with fidelity, and above all, with impartiality. It is also essential that he who rebukes with authority be himself blameless. "Be not partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure." But words are added to show that purity does not require austerity,

—“Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.”

4. Of slaves. The early Christian Churches contained many members, and even office-bearers, who were slaves,* and on their behaviour the credit of the Christian name in no small degree depended. Now our holy religion always was and is hostile to human slavery, but it did not abruptly change the long established relations of society; it acted more slowly but surely in its proper character as a directly moral and spiritual force, producing, indirectly, great political and social effects. The Apostle therefore would stir up no servile insurrection, but would trust to the spread of a nobler faith and a more just and gentle spirit for a permanent abolition of slavery. Timothy is to charge the Christian bondmen and bondwomen not to bear themselves proudly, or exhibit a rebellious temper before heathen masters, lest prejudice should arise against the name and doctrine of God. Such slaves as have Christian masters are not to behave as though the spiritual liberty, equality, and fraternity in the Church effaced the civil distinction previously existing. Slaves are still to serve with patience and with due respect, trusting to the influence of the Gospel in ameliorating their condition, and sooner or later putting an end to that system of bondage which was unjust in itself and mischievous in its influence on public and private morals, but which, being long and deeply rooted all over the Roman Empire, could not be safely eradicated in a day.

The principle here laid down, so characteristic of the practical moderation and sagacity of St. Paul, is capable of application even where slavery has ceased. It condemns a tendency sometimes shown to make church-fellowship a pretext for social disrespect, and a warrant for a sort of intrusive familiarity. The Apostle admires meekness and patience in those who are

* Pliny, in his famous letter to the Emperor Trajan, regarding the Christians in Bithynia, reports his having put two female slaves to the torture, who were “said to officiate in their religious functions.” Very likely they were deaconesses.

placed at an earthly disadvantage; and, without discouraging aspiration and progress, gives high praise to a virtue which is now rather out of fashion—contentment. “Godliness with contentment is great gain.”

5. Of injury to the Church from covetousness: After all, it was a natural and reasonable desire which burned in the heart of the slave—the longing to be free. But there is another desire which goes to a most unreasonable extreme, and in all times has wrought great damage to human souls—the craving to be rich. So the Apostle Paul speaks out very distinctly on this point: “They who aim at being rich fall into temptation and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition.”* Then follows a saying which is very often inaccurately quoted: “A root of all evils is the love of money.” Who has not seen this in actual life? Avarice, engrossing the heart, exerts an injurious effect on the whole character, hardens and narrows the affections, and tends to make men timid, mean, tyrannical, and suspicious. The man of God is happy who sets his heart on better treasure, “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.”

Returning to this subject (chap. vi. 17), St. Paul shows that it is not the possession of riches which he condemns, but the greedy love of them. No doubt there were some, though not many, rich men among the Christians at Ephesus, and in other large cities, even at this early period. Timothy was to exhort them to (1.) humility of mind; (2.) faith in the living God, who is the rich Giver; and (3.) open-handed beneficence. And further, to assist in overcoming the resistance of selfishness, it is added that a right use of riches here, in good actions dictated by good motives, will have recompense of reward in the life to come. When the avaricious are by their own actions sunk in destruction and perdition, the well-doers and generous givers lay hold on eternal life.

A final charge to Timothy brings the letter to a close. He is to hold fast the Gospel truth, and shun the errors, subtleties,

* “*Tristis gradatio*,” remarks Bengel.

and boastings which are already preparing that plague of Gnosticism, which so long and so seriously infested the early Church.

It is not within our plan to dwell on particular sayings or texts ; but a reader of this Epistle will find it full of *memorabilia*.* Many of its phrases are household words in the Church ; and some of its compact expressions have found their way into the minds of persons who seldom, if ever, read the Bible.

There are words in this book for all classes and all uses ; but, as a whole, it is intended for the study of Christian ministers, and other thoughtful men. Indeed, there are very few Church questions on which this apostolic letter does not cast some valuable light.

As we read the Book, we perceive it to have been written throughout under a profound sense of the majesty of God. He is lauded as “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God.” He is “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto.” In the same adoring temper of mind should the Epistle be perused and pondered. We shall understand it best when we are ourselves profoundly impressed with the hope of the coming of Christ, and the thought of the majesty of God. “To whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.”

* See chap. i. 5, 15 ; ii. 5 ; iii. 16 ; vi. 6, 10, 12.

II. TIMOTHY.

WHEN we hear of the death of a cherished friend, we are glad that we have preserved his last letter to us ; and its contents seem all the more weighty and precious that we can hear from him no more. Before us is the last letter extant of that powerful letter-writer, the Apostle Paul. It proceeded from him during his second imprisonment at Rome, and shortly before his martyrdom, which occurred A.D. 67 or 68. Addressed to Timothy, his child in the faith, and companion in labour, it is full of fatherly kindness, and breathes throughout a grave and tender spirit. Its object is to inform Timothy of the dangers which now threatened the Apostle, to fortify his courage, and to bid him come shortly to his now aged friend, bringing Mark with him from the East.

In reading this letter, we are struck by four particulars in which Paul the servant was made like his Lord.

I. *The sense of loneliness.* As the Lord Jesus at the end of His career was left alone, all His disciples having forsaken Him and fled, so was Paul in his last sufferings alone. No disciple or friend ventured to stand with him before the cruel Emperor. "At my first defence no man took my part, but all forsook me." Nevertheless, there was consolation for the forsaken one. As the Master said, "The Father is with Me," so the servant said, "The Lord stood by me, and strengthened me."*

During St. Paul's first detention at Rome, he suffered little more than restraint, and was freely visited by Christian brethren, But on the occasion of his second imprisonment, those who

* John xvi. 32 ; 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.

identified themselves with him dreaded, or actually incurred, personal danger. On the Jews and Christians indiscriminately lay at that time a culumnious charge of having set fire to the city of Rome; and St. Paul, as a Jew by birth, and a ringleader of the obnoxious Christians, was in a very critical position. In the circumstances, few of the brethren had sufficient courage to acknowledge or visit him. All the Asiatic Christians at Rome, afraid to compromise themselves, turned away from the Apostle. Two of these are named; and in contrast with them is mentioned one faithful friend, who was probably an Ephesian—Onesiphorus, who, all the more that he knew the perilous condition of St. Paul, diligently sought him out, and refreshed his spirit.*

The Apostle felt it a hardship to be in bonds as a malefactor; † and peculiarly trying to his affectionate nature to be deserted, or, at all events, unvisited by his brethren in the Lord. Demas, who had been a companion during the first imprisonment, had now forsaken him, "having loved this present world." It is not meant that he had renounced Christianity; but he was not sufficiently weaned from the world to associate at all risks with the apostolic prisoner; and, intent on his own comfort, he departed to safe quarters in Thessalonica. The faithful Tychicus had been sent by the Apostle himself to Ephesus; and other friends were scattered. Still Paul was not quite alone. There were those who sympathised and communed with him; and four of these receive honourable mention, viz., Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia. But the only close companion of the venerable sufferer was that "beloved Physician," who ranks among the most important of the New Testament writers. "Only Luke is with me." Then the Apostle, with that keen love of friendly companionship which distinguished him, desired the presence of Timothy and of John Mark too, for, as we have noticed in the Epistle to the Colossians, though the latter of these had once been the occasion of disagreement with Barnabas, he had grown in the esteem of St. Paul, who had found him "profitable in ministry."

* Chap. i. 15-18.

† Chap. ii. 19.

Excepting always Jesus Christ, our perfect Example, there never lived a man who presented a finer combination of tenderness and courage than the Apostle of the Gentiles. Himself a warm friend, he appreciated the friendship of others. He loved the company of good men and the sympathy of good women; and with proportional acuteness he was pained by the desertion of his former associates. As he drew near the end of his course, he longed to have with him the familiar faces of old friends. But no abandonment by weak and timid brethren could bate one jot of his courage as a witness for the Lord. Alone and undaunted he stood before the Emperor. No matter what might befall him, he felt assured that the Lord Jesus would deliver him from every evil work, and preserve him "unto His heavenly kingdom." *

II. *The contemplation of martyrdom.*

We have always regarded it as enhancing the self-devoting love of Christ, that He clearly foresaw His death at Jerusalem; and, far from shunning it, thought of it, spoke of it, and resolutely went up to meet it. Something like this we trace in His servant Paul. He knew that bonds and imprisonment awaited him in every city, and he went from city to city to endure them. At last, as "Paul the aged," he sees death draw near—cruel death—with opprobrium and violence; and he betrays no shrinking. He also is to suffer for the elect's sake, though not as an atonement. He is cheered by "the joy set before him," and looks through sufferings to the bright reward.†

What conformity to Christ! Whether on a journey or at rest, at liberty or in bonds, in enforced silence or in the place of testimony, St. Paul lives not to himself; and he cannot die to himself. He lives for the cause of the Lord Jesus and the good of His people: and for these ends he is not unwilling to die.

What good hope, too, in Christ! "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." The venerable man does not conceal

* Chap. iv. 18.

† Chap. ii. 10.

from himself that this imprisonment will end in martyrdom; and is not sorry to think that his struggle is nearly over, and his work almost done. "I am already being poured out"—a willing sacrifice for Christ and the Church (*σπένδομαι*), "and the time of my departure is at hand. The good strife I have striven; the race I have completed; the faith I have preserved." So much he can say looking back, and enjoying the testimony of a good conscience. Looking forward, he troubles not himself about the manner of his death. Will it be by the cross, by the wild beasts, or by the sword? Little it matters to the saint. Far beyond death he looks to the day of the appearing of Jesus Christ. That unjust judge, the Roman Emperor, may sentence him to die; but no manner of death can strike terror into a man who sees afar off the Righteous Judge conferring upon him a crown of righteousness, and not on him only, but on all the faithful servants who love their Lord's appearing.*

III. *The foresight of evil.* Through this Epistle runs a vein of sadness as regards the progress of error and degeneracy among the Christians. There are urgent warnings against unprofitable logomachies and profane babblings; and men are indicated whose teaching would eat like a gangrene into the life of the Church.†

Here, again, the servant is like his Lord. Jesus Christ before His death predicted many sorrows, the rise of false prophets, the abounding of iniquity, the unwatchfulness of servants, and the exclusion of foolish virgins from the palace of the King. In like manner, St. Paul before his death foretells perilous times, the exorbitant selfishness and wilfulness of men, their impatience of healthy doctrine, and heaping up of teachers "after their own lusts."

Is it asked, When shall these things be? The prophecy casts its dark shadow over a large proportion of what is called Church

* Chap. iv. 6-8.

† Hymenæus and Philetus, in their view of the resurrection, appear to have been forerunners of Swedenborg.

history. Such history, notwithstanding its noble records of missionary heroism, covers a melancholy progress in degeneracy of life and apostasy from the truth. Theodoret, in the fifth century, wrote on this part of the Epistle—"I think that it is our time which is here predicted. For our life is full of these evils; and, while we bear about us an aspect of piety, it is the image of wickedness which we produce by our works." Over and over again have the words of St. Paul been applied to periods of moral confusion and decay, and these have been pronounced to be emphatically "the perilous times." Would that the times were past! Our fear is that the prediction is not yet exhausted. In so far as civilisation is not pervaded and controlled by a belief of the truth, and a sense of responsibility to God, its tendency is to increase ingenious selfishness; and there is danger of a generation of men being produced more wilful, boastful, pleasure-loving, and proud, than the world has yet seen, ready to hoot down the healthy doctrine of the Gospel, and to cast off with scorn all religious restraint. The very possibility of such a danger ought to incite faithful servants of Christ to "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching."*

IV. *The exhortation to fidelity.*

The Lord Jesus, before He suffered, encouraged His disciples to bear the hatred of the world, and exclusion from the synagogues for His name; and He exhorted them to love as brethren, and to stand firm as witnesses. St. Paul pursues the same strain. He is quite aware of the progress already made by false doctrine, notwithstanding all his efforts to prevent it, and he has prevision, in the Spirit, of heavier evils to come; but he will not give up the battle while he lives, nor advise his friends to cease from the conflict as a hopeless one. St. Paul would be ashamed of those brethren in modern times who recoil into mere individualism, and sit with long faces in quiet chambers, deploring the ruins of Christendom. Himself a soldier who

* Chap. iv. 2.

had fought a good fight, he will persevere in training good soldiers of Christ, and sending them out to the battle. He seeks to brace the courage of Timothy to suffer along with him for the Gospel, to hold fast the form of sound words received by him from apostolic lips, to keep the good deposit entrusted to him, committing it again to faithful men; to endure hardness as a good soldier; to show himself "to God approved, a workman not ashamed;" to "watch in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of the ministry."* The Epistle is in this respect a strong tonic from a wise physician. It is the blast of a trumpet blown by a veteran hero.

Consider the motives and encouragements with which St. Paul urges his son Timothy to be faithful and brave.

1. The gift of God in him, the χάρισμα bestowed on him through the imposition of the Apostle's hands. This was his spiritual endowment for service, and it was his duty to stir or kindle it into lively action; nay, the Spirit of God rested on him, and he was to keep the doctrine and charge entrusted to him "by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us." As for the deposit committed to St. Paul, he knew that the Lord was able to keep it; and Timothy should rely for the keeping of his "deposit" on the Spirit of the Lord.†

It is also shown to Timothy that the spirit given to the servants of Christ is not one of "cowardice," ‡ shrinking from the duty of testimony because of the risk or contempt which it may incur. On the contrary, it is the spirit of (1.) Power from on high; sufficiency which is of God, ability in Christ, power to speak or be silent, as duty to the Lord may require; power of endurance, and power of resistance; power for fighting the battle and for running the race; (2.) and love, seeking not its own—love which tends to cast out fear, and, more than any other influence, nerves to arduous toils and perilous enterprises—love in the truth, which makes the Christian calm and strong; and (3.) a sound mind, represented in the Greek original by

* Chap. iv. 5.

† Chap. i. 12, 14.

‡ Chap. i. 7.

one word which occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It denotes sobriety of mind, capable of self-correction and self-control; a well-schooled and well-balanced mind, that sees things in their just proportions and relations, and avoiding narrowness, feverishness, and exaggeration, moves on with vigour in the paths of duty.

2. The certainty of Christian doctrine, as founded on the ancient Scriptures. The false teachers erred, because they knew not the Scriptures, and could not recognise the harmony between those writings and the apostolic testimony. Timothy, on the contrary, knew the Scriptures from childhood under maternal instruction; and, when he heard from St. Paul the testimony of the Gospel, the youth grasped it as the key to the Old Testament, and rejoiced. All his previous studies were illuminated in the light of Jesus Christ.

Then far be it from him to swerve from the truth! Let him remember the apostolic testimony, and abide therein. Let him continue to search the Scriptures; for the study, good for a child, is also perfecting to a man of God. "Every Scripture theopneustic is also profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and discipline which is in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, throughly furnished for every good work."*

3. The approval of the good Master during the time of service. A soldier is separated from ordinary civil life to serve the crown. Timothy is admonished that a soldier of Christ is separated to His service, and ought to think only of pleasing Him. It is not for the warrior on a campaign to study his own comfort and convenience. "No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of (civil) life, in order that he may please him who hath enrolled him." To the same effect is the language regarding "a workman not ashamed," but "approved to God," and "a vessel for honour, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work." †

4. The expectation of the Lord's appearing. As in all his writings, that "great day" is here kept steadily in the Apostle's

* Chap. iii. 16, 17.

† Chap. ii. 4, 15, 21.

view. The sacred deposit is to be kept "against that day," when it is to be accounted for. St. Paul cannot reward Onesiphorus for his kindness, but desires for him the Lord's mercy "in that day." He cannot control "Alexander the copper-smith," but the Lord will deal with that man "according to his works." He expects for himself a day of death or departure, but he looks for a crown of righteousness "at that day," when death shall be swallowed up in victory.

The charge to Timothy is very solemn: "Before God and Christ Jesus, who shall judge living and dead, and by His epiphany and His kingdom." * There is something here to stir every mind. Prepare, O man, to meet thy God! Bow down, O sinner, at the feet of Christ Jesus, now unseen, but present to save; or, when He appears, thou shalt be driven from Him into darkness. Watch and pray, believer; for thou knowest not the day or the hour wherein the Lord shall come. Work on, O patient servant, in the hope of His appearing! If thou suffer with Him, thou shalt reign with Him. If thou labour for Him, thou shalt rest with Him. Finally, for those exercising, like Timothy, a public ministry, let much prayer be made, that they may obey the precepts here delivered by the Apostle Paul, as with his dying breath—

By day and night strict guard to keep,
To warn the sinner, cheer the saint,
Nourish His lambs, and feed His sheep.

* Chap. iv. 1.

TITUS.

OF Titus we know little; but this circumstance does not materially affect the value to us of the Epistle which was addressed to him by St. Paul. Like the first letter to Timothy, it is clothed with an official rather than a personal character.

In the Acts of the Apostles Titus is not mentioned; but we learn from Gal. ii. that he was with Paul and Barnabas when they went to Jerusalem on the question of Gentile exemption from circumcision. He was a Greek, and was not circumcised.* Indeed, of all the fellow-labourers of St. Paul he appears to have been the one most disconnected with Judaism. Timothy was of semi-Jewish origin, and was circumcised; Luke was probably a pure Gentile, but appears to have been a Jewish proselyte before he became a Christian; but Titus came straight from Gentile heathenism into the Church of God.

This we know, that Titus was much employed by St. Paul on special missions, and possessed his full confidence as a man of prudence and energy. On that journey to the East, which intervened between his first and second Roman imprisonments, the Apostle, having left Timothy at Ephesus, left Titus also in Crete, to represent his authority and complete the organisation of the Church. To the island of Crete the Gospel must have been carried soon after the day of Pentecost; for among the Jews and proselytes then present in Jerusalem, and addressed by the Apostle Peter, some are said to have been "Cretans."

* Dr. Farrar thinks otherwise, and gives his reasons in his *Life and Work of St. Paul*, vol i. pp. 412-420. But the great preponderance of opinion, ancient and modern, is against him. We are fortified in our judgment by Bishop Lightfoot's Commentary on Gal. ii. 3-5.

About thirty years after, when Paul left Titus there, the Gospel was spread throughout the island. There was a congregation in every city; and ancient Crete was famous for the number of its cities. It was the Apostle's wish that Titus should perfect the ecclesiastical order of those congregations; acting, not as a prelate, for prelates were not yet known, but as an apostolic commissary to organise and adjust.

The letter of instructions now before us was written in all probability a few months after the first Epistle to Timothy. It is brief in form and condensed in style. It deals mainly with practical matters, but also contains two very precious statements of salvation by grace.

The designation of the Apostle in the opening of his letter is full and striking. He writes as "a servant of God and apostle of Jesus Christ according to the faith of God's elect." He is no mere exponent of religious opinion, but teaches that righteousness of God in the Gospel which was revealed from faith to faith. He is also occupied with "the full knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness." The expression is well chosen, for it is an invariable mark of divine truth that it promotes goodness in those who with their hearts receive it. With this he has "hope of eternal life, which God, who lies not, promised before eternal times." Already that life is possessed by believers in Jesus Christ, for it is the gift of God; but they still hope for its full fruition, perfection, and manifestation, according to the good confidence expressed in another Epistle: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory."*

I. *The instructions of the Apostle to Titus* relate—

1. To the superintendence of congregations.
2. To the exhortations proper to be addressed to various classes in the Church.

1. Superintendence or episcopate. It is impressed upon Titus that a Church without elders is defective in its appointments;

* Col. iii. 4.

and he is directed to ordain such officers in every city of Crete. Nothing can be more clear than that the Apostle regarded the order of presbyters as that which is universally and permanently required in the Church for pastoral superintendence, and that he knew no distinction between presbyters and bishops. While directing the ordination of the former, he thus describes their qualifications: "If any be blameless—for a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God, not self-willed, not soon angry," &c. (chap. i. 5-9).

But "lay elders," many will say, cannot surely be bishops. We know nothing of lay elders: but if what are meant are elders engaged in worldly professions and trades, it is surely obvious that most if not all of the primitive elders were of that class. A newly-formed Christian congregation did not support all its elders as a clergy. It was enough that men of good repute among the Christian people were ordained to take the oversight of them in the Lord. They sustained themselves as before, and tended the flock of God as they had opportunity, and according to the gift bestowed on each. These were the bishops. We grant that many details of ecclesiastical administration may be left to be regulated according to the course of events and the state of Christian society: we believe it to be eminently expedient that public teachers and preachers should be set quite free from secular business and care, in order to give all their time and strength to sacred study and church work: but we are at a loss to see why any other episcopate should be wanted now than that of elders ordained in every city, and combined together for the general welfare of the Church throughout an island, a province, or a kingdom.

The qualifications of presbyter-bishops are prescribed to Titus in much the same manner as formerly to Timothy. Stress is laid on temper and character; the only intellectual condition being that of aptness to teach and handle the faithful word. It was indispensable that the bishops should show a good example to the flock. It was also well that they should be competent to instruct and exhort the brethren within their

district or charge, and so to use the word of the Lord as to convince gainsayers.

The appointment of such superintendents of the congregations in Crete was all the more necessary because of the character of the opposition to the Gospel on that island. There were many vain talkers and deceivers, chiefly of Jewish origin, who from corrupt and avaricious motives ingratiated themselves with unsuspecting families, and by their teachings in the houses of the people subverted the Christian faith. This was the more to be deplored because the natural character of the Cretans was such as to facilitate the pernicious devices of those teachers. The Apostle quotes a line from the old poet Epimenides, who lived in Crete 600 B.C., and described the people as false, fierce, (*θηρία*), and gluttonous. The Gospel as the power of God was quite able to elevate and purify even such a population, but the deceitful and coarse character of the inhabitants made the task a difficult one, and gave advantage to those who disturbed the peace of the Churches and corrupted Christian life. Therefore was it needful that elders should be ordained to watch over the congregations, and put those vain talkers to silence; needful too that Titus himself should severely correct those of the Christians in Crete who had been "giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men that turn from the truth."*

A death-blow to the errors of the false teachers is dealt in the memorable statement, "Unto the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but both their mind and conscience are defiled." A saying this liable to serious abuse if it be pressed too far and taken by itself, without other teachings of the Apostle regarding the things which must be absolutely shunned; but a saying which, rightly apprehended and applied, is as an axe laid to the root of the whole theory of purification by externalism and ceremonial. It is a clean heart that is wanted. An evil heart pours out defilement over everything—a clean heart purifies all that it

* Chap. i. 14.

approaches, and shakes off the taint of moral infection and decay.

2. Exhortations fit to be addressed to various classes in the Church.—Titus is charged to “speak things in harmony with the healthy instruction”* of the Gospel. There is no need to descant on these. The admonitions are quite plain and practical, and call not for comment, but for obedience.

What aged saints should be, both men and women, is first told. Then what the younger saints should be, both young women and young men—emphasis being laid on steadiness and sobriety of mind, as bearing promise of a discreet and honourable career. Titus, being himself a young man in comparison with Paul, is charged to practise as well as preach, and to combine good works with doctrine incorrupt.

Knowing the restless, intractable nature of the population of Crete, the Apostle adds a special admonition to those of the Christians there who were slaves. They are to be subject to the masters to whom they belong by law and usage, and to beware of contradicting and of purloining. It is a beautiful thought, and one which must have been most consolatory to the slaves in Crete, whom public opinion regarded as little above cattle, that they by patience and fidelity, even in their condition of life, might actually “adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour.”

Titus was also to exhort the Christians to beware of insubordination to the government. Magistracy is an ordinance of God; and His people, while fully at liberty, and even under obligation, to alter and reform in all constitutional ways whatever is amiss in the social and political state of the country in which they dwell, are bound by the highest considerations of religious duty to respect government, to love peace, to pay tribute, and show that honour for rulers and judges which is an essential element and safeguard of human civilisation.

II. *Evangelical motives to holiness and meekness.*—These

* Chap. ii. 1.

are powerfully stated in two notable passages of this Epistle.

In both of them the salvation proclaimed in the Gospel is shown to be of God. And it is characteristic of the Pastoral Epistles to refer saviourship to God (1 Tim. i. 1, ii. 3, iv. 10; Tit. i. 3, ii. 10, iii. 4). As Paul grew old, the thought of the love of God loomed larger to him, as it does to all experienced Christians.

1. Of the first of these passages (chap. ii. 11-14) it has been well said, that it "is one of the *loca classica* for biblical theology, and one of the comparatively few places in the Pastoral Epistles which furnish important contributions to our knowledge of the doctrinal system of Paul. We here find most perfectly fused together, and penetrating each, faith and life, doctrine and duty, theory and practice."* The passage runs thus: "The grace of God, salvatory to all men, hath appeared, training us to the intent that we, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, may live soberly and justly and piously in this present world, waiting for the blessed hope and manifestation of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to Himself a treasure-people, zealous of good works." Thus everything in salvation is moved by the grace of God, which not only rescues men from condemnation, but gives them a new aim in life, turning them from sin to righteousness. By the action of grateful motive and the operation of the Holy Spirit, grace persuades, impels, and educates to a new life of sobriety as respects self, justice towards others, piety towards God above.

This new life is no dull or melancholy thing. It has a blessed hope. It is indeed impelled by one epiphany of Christ, and attracted by another. From the first in grace, it has its motive and instruction; toward the second in glory it stretches forward, and, in the hope of that glory, it is cheered and purified. We are schooled to moderation in all things by the

* Dr. Van Oosterzee in Lange's *Comment*.

thought that the Lord is at hand. We are kept from fainting in the trial of our faith by the assurance that it will be "found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." We turn away from sin, because we look for that Saviour who gave Himself for us in order to deliver and cleanse us from all evil. We are His treasure-people, not our own, and He will come to claim us. Therefore we are under the strongest obligation and inducement to be "zealous of good works."

Such was the doctrine of salvation taught by St. Paul, and committed to Titus. They do not teach as the Apostle taught who proclaim redemption from punishment, and scarcely touch on redemption from iniquity. Neither do they who throw the second advent of our Lord into the background, or say that it is equivalent to the day of our death, or treat it as a point of secondary importance and doubtful disputation. On the contrary, the hope of His appearing is a mighty instrument of practical discipline and purifying in the Christian life and patience.

2. With a view to commend meekness, gentleness, and lowliness of heart, St. Paul would have the Christians remember how much they themselves had needed forbearance from men and compassion from God. He sketches in dark colours their former sinful state, and then dilates on the fulness of the salvation which had come to them from the Divine "kindness and philanthropy" (chap. iii. 4-7). There was no ground of self-boasting. Works of man's righteousness had no part in the matter. According to His own mercy, in which He delights, not even according to man's thoughts of or cries for mercy, but according to the mercy itself, deep and boundless, God has saved us.

In saving us, God purifies and quickens us in "the laver of regeneration," of which the laver in the court of the tabernacle was a visible sign in Israel, and the laver of baptism is a visible sign in the Church. This is followed up by "the renewing of the Holy Ghost" developing and confirming the regeneration in

character and life. It is the great feature of our dispensation that the Holy Ghost is "shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour." Under the teaching of the Spirit we are brought into a new position and a new consolation: (1.) Justification by grace; (2.) heirship with Christ according to the hope of eternal life.

The inference from this is, that they who have obtained such mercy ought to show mercy. They who are forgiven should forgive. They who have been saved through the Divine kindness ought to be "gentle, showing all meekness unto all men." Nay, the Apostle desires Titus to dwell much and frequently on these evangelical truths, in order to induce believers to be fruitful in good works. Many questions and disputes are "unprofitable and vain," but the truths of salvation by grace "are good and profitable unto men."

The Epistle closes with a few personal messages and an affectionate greeting. We hear for the first time of "Zenas the lawyer;" and it is pleasant to think of the union in Christ of what are called the learned professions, when Zenas the lawyer and Luke the physician met with Paul the theologian and preacher. Apollos is again mentioned, and it is evident that he was a man of mark in the Greek Churches of the period. Though he began his ministry with defective views, he had been wise enough to listen to instruction; he had therefore become an effective missionary, and was esteemed and valued by the Apostle Paul to the end of his career.

Expressions used in the end of this letter indicate to us a duty for which the evangelistic activity of our own time may furnish frequent opportunity. It is that of helping and forwarding missionaries, "so that nothing be wanting to them." Let our Churches not only be ordered after the apostolic directions, and instructed in the apostolic doctrine, but also considerate and generous in furthering the propagation of the Gospel; and then the benediction which St. Paul pronounces on the faithful in Crete will fall on them also,—“Grace be with you all.”

PHILEMON.

WHAT is before us is a private letter from St. Paul to a Christian gentleman of Colosse; and we rejoice to find him the same man in private communications as in public addresses and epistles. We recognise the courteous manner, the ardent mind, the devout Christ-exalting spirit. Timothy is joined with Paul in the salutation, but throughout the letter it is the Apostle only who speaks.

The occasion of the Epistle is easily gathered from its contents. Philemon was a man of position, who had been converted to the Christian faith under St. Paul's ministry, probably during the stay of the Apostle at Ephesus, for he had never visited Colosse. Apphia, so cordially greeted along with Philemon (ver. 2), was doubtless his wife; and Archippus, named not here only but also in the Epistle to the Colossians,* a son or other near relative. The house was resorted to for Christian worship; for Paul and Timothy send greeting to the Church in the house.

Among the household slaves was one named Onesimus, by birth a Colossian.† He was not a Christian; and, giving way to the temptation to "purloin,"‡ which must have been strongly felt by slaves who had no rights of property, he defrauded his master and absconded. He bent his steps to Rome, where he might easily escape detection among the multitudes who thronged the capital of the world. Arrived there, he found the impunity he sought, and probably enjoyed a little time of idleness and riotous living, while he squandered his

* Chap. iv. 17. † "Who is from you."—Col. iv. 9. ‡ Titus ii. 10.

booty ; but his money came to an end, and when the brief madness of his indulgence was over, and the companions of wasteful hours had deserted him, Onesimus was left alone with an empty purse and an unquiet conscience.

St. Paul was then in Rome, suffering his first imprisonment. He was under the care of a soldier who was responsible for his custody, but was allowed to live in "his own hired house." The house, in all likelihood, was some such hut as the Emperor's minions and freedmen occupied in the neighbourhood of the palace ; but it was the "St. Paul's Cathedral" of the time, and many resorted to it for instruction and fellowship. We have already been informed that Paul "received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ." *

To this house Onesimus repaired in his distress. It may have been that he went in, as by accident, but more probably he went because he knew that this Paul was the very preacher through whom his master had become a Christian, and he had been wont to hear his name mentioned in Philemon's house with veneration and esteem. St. Paul, on the contrary, knew nothing of him or of his history, but preached to him, as to all comers, the Gospel of the blessed God. While he did so, the Spirit of the Lord opened the heart of this hearer, so that he was begotten again of the word of truth ; for the Apostle writes of him as "my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds."

How the grace of God follows the unworthy ! Onesimus had possessed in Colosse every advantage for learning the Christian doctrine, but he learned it not. He then loved the darkness rather than the light. But the good Lord willed not that he should perish ; and the grace which he refused at Colosse followed him to Rome, found him, and prevailed with him there. If his master had given him up as a worthless and wicked man, the Lord had not given him up. But, as his master was a Christian, we shall rather suppose that he prayed

* Acts xxviii. 30, 31.

for the man who had despitefully used him ; and if so, it was in answer to such prayer that Onesimus was guided to Paul's house in Rome, and thus brought under the power of the truth as it is in Jesus.

Not his sin only was shown to the runaway, but also the blood of Christ that acquits and cleanses from all sin. The Apostle preached forgiveness of sins, and the sinner before him received it in faith. His heart was thus "sprinkled from an evil conscience," and the man became a new creature, raised to a new position in Christ, filled with new desires, and fitted for new fellowship. The slave became a freedman of Christ. The runaway became a brother beloved of an Apostle and of saints. So pleased with him was St. Paul that he would gladly have retained him to cheer and help him in his bonds ; and gladly would Onesimus have tarried at Rome for such a purpose. But he confided to the Apostle the shameful manner and reason of his flight from Colosse, and Paul sent him back to Philemon with this letter explaining the circumstances, and intimating an earnest desire that Onesimus might be kindly received. He was also so thoughtful as to mention Onesimus at the same time in his letter to the Colossian Church, certifying him as "a faithful and beloved brother."* He was not to be suspected or taken in with a grudge ; but, being in Church fellowship in one city, was certified as entitled to the same fellowship in another.

The letter to Philemon is a model of tact and delicacy. Luther calls it "a charming and masterly example of Christian love." Erasmus, thinking most of its outward form, remarks that "Cicero never wrote with greater elegance."

There is a celebrated writer of antiquity with one of whose compositions this Epistle may be compared. Among the writings of the younger Pliny is extant a private letter to his friend Sabinianus,† interceding for a freedman who had deserted the service of this friend, and incurred his displeasure. Pliny's

* Col. iv. 9.

† Letters of Pliny the Consul, Bk. ix., Epistle 21.

style is graceful ; but those who have compared the two letters will say, without hesitation, that St. Paul's is equal in tact to the other, and far superior in the motives and considerations which he urges on his friend Philemon.

A moment's reflection will show that the tact was not superfluous ; the case required to be carefully handled. St. Paul would commend Onesimus, yet not excuse his fault ; ameliorate the condition of the slave, yet not interfere with the legal rights of the master ; propose what he might enjoin, but preferred to ask for love's sake. There is much skill evinced in courteous and persuasive forms of expression. There is also a real pathos in the letter, lit up with gleams of that humour which St. Paul had in common with all men of robust and vigorous minds.*

Philemon had suffered loss, but the divine Providence had turned his loss to gain. He lost an "unprofitable" servant, and got a "profitable" one.† He lost a careless and dishonest slave, and he got "a brother beloved, both in the flesh," or in earthly relations of life, "and in the Lord," in spiritual communion with Christ. The lawfulness in God's sight of retaining a Christian brother in slavery, however lenient, this Epistle does not discuss. The Gospel, as we have already seen, was essentially opposed in spirit to human slavery ; but it abolished that system of organised injustice, by changing the dispositions and minds of men, and inducing a new state of public opinion, not by stirring servile insurrections, or social revolutions effected by force. It was enough for St. Paul's purpose that Philemon should receive Onesimus heartily as a Christian brother. Let his own conscience, let his Christian instincts tell him, whether he should relegate such a man to domestic slavery, or set him free to return to the Apostle, if he so desired, and to promote the spread of that Gospel which had wrought upon himself so great a transformation.

Let us pause here to muse on the wisdom of Providence

* See Rev. S. Cox on Private Letters of St. Paul and St. John.

† Ver. 11. The name Onesimus in Greek means useful or profitable.

which turns the unprofitable into the profitable, and, through temporal loss, brings to us higher riches. A possession or a joy departs from us for a season, only to be received again in a nobler and more lasting form. That such is the way of Providence may not, indeed, appear to every eye. The return may be in quite a different form from the departure or loss. It is not the same Onesimus; it is a better one. But such is the experience of all who truly fear the Lord; losing in one form, and finding in another; a departure for a season, and a receiving for ever. A Christian loses his own life, and finds it; loses earthly joys, and finds heavenly ones; loses earthly friends, but is destined to find them in a brighter sphere and a more glorious body. Thy brother is dead: "thy brother shall rise again."

Of this there is a parable in creation every year. The summer beauty departs, the flowers die, the trees lose their foliage, the fields of corn become fields of stubble, and Nature seems bereft of vigour, colour, and power to delight. But it is only for a season, and then the forces of Nature revive, and all its lost charms return. Its decaying, departing life is born again in the smiles of a new spring, and invigorated by the glow of another summer. Year by year we lose, and yet our loss is turned to gain. So is it in our human life. God lets losses come to us, and chilling cares fall on our hearts, but they do us good in the latter end. They even make us more prosperous. If anything of value is taken away, it is somehow bettered and restored. There must be winter in our lot; but He who is the God of our life conducts us to a spring and a summer that shall never end. Temporary losses are thus transmuted into lasting gains, and light affliction for a moment into "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

St. Paul had confidence in Onesimus that he would now prove as valuable to Philemon as he had been worthless before. His strong desire was that his former master, and the Church at Colosse, should, without misgiving, receive Onesimus on his return into the "fellowship." This, indeed, is the great thought

of the letter. There is a fellowship in Christ which overrides all outward distinction, swallows up a thousand upbraidings, and makes masters and servants brethren in the Lord. It is the warm, generous, sacred communion of saints.

But what of the wrong done to Philemon by his servant? It is pretty clearly implied that Onesimus had purloined his master's property. It is certain that, by absconding, he put his master to some loss; and the Apostle does not pass this over in silence, but touches the point with great delicacy, and in a Christ-like spirit. "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I, Paul, have written with mine own hand, I will repay; not to say that thou owest unto me even thine own self besides."*

We follow Luther in regarding this interposal of Paul in behalf of a wrongdoer, as a touching illustration of the interposal of Jesus Christ for the transgressors. It is only too possible to talk fluently of Christ's suretyship for sinners, and at the same time live quite out of harmony with that truth, a self-seeking and self-contained life. But St. Paul entered into the mind of his heavenly Master, and lived in sympathy with His great suretyship. Because and as Christ had loved him, and borne his sins and sorrows, therefore and so Paul loved poor Onesimus, and took his liabilities on himself, made himself responsible for the wrongdoer who could not atone for his own transgression.

We admit that the illustration is defective. The relation subsisting between a master and his slave, even in its mildest and most tolerable form, cannot accurately or adequately represent the relation subsisting between the holy God and us His creatures, for He is a Father as well as a Master. But then He is a Master as well as a Father; and in this view, the illustration here suggested has some point and value. God has been good and merciful to us: His providence kind, His law most equitable. Nevertheless, we have returned evil for good, departed from Him, disobeyed and robbed Him. Say that we are brought to feel in conscience the guilt and shame of this,

* Ver. 18, 19.

yet we cannot make compensation for it, and therefore are afraid and unwilling to return to God. Lo ! One on whom we have no claim, and who Himself has done no wrong, interposes for us. It is all of grace : and this is the plea of Him who reconciles us to God. "Receive them as Myself. Put the wrong which they have done, or the debt they owe, on Mine account."

This gave encouragement to Onesimus, dispelling all his fear. It was written in the letter—"Receive him as myself." If Paul should go to Colosse, would he be rejected by Philemon? Certainly not. Would Paul be gladly received? Assuredly. Then Onesimus will not be rejected; Onesimus must be gladly received.

Let a sinner, any sinner, so return to the God whom we have offended, and from whom we have fled. Jesus Christ interposes for him as Mediator. He will be received in Christ, for Christ, and even as Christ. The transgressor, pleading for pardon through Christ, and pleaded for by Him, can no more be rejected than He can be; must as certainly be received as Christ is received, and loved as Christ is loved.

We can imagine the approach of Tychicus and Onesimus to the town of Colosse. The former carries the letter to the Church; but the latter will not show himself to the Church, or claim his privilege there as a brother in the Lord, till he has been to his master's house, and delivered the private letter from St. Paul. His bearing is grave, and his demeanour subdued, for he cannot forget the foolish and sinful way in which he had left that house, probably a few months before. But he is not afraid, for he thinks of what Paul has said in the letter which he carries in his bosom; and he is glad that, at all events, it is not the police who have brought him back; it is repentance; it is love, and the sense of duty. When he reaches that familiar door, the servants, whose apartments in ancient houses were on either side of the entrance, recognise him, wonder at his return, and are struck by a certain serenity of aspect and refinement of bearing, for which they cannot account. But Onesimus cannot stay to give explanations to the servants; by

and by he will tell them all ; but his first interview must be with the master himself. So he makes straight for the chamber of Philemon, and casting himself at his feet, delivers to him this letter from St. Paul. It is read aloud, not without tears of joy. Philemon embraces the lost one found ; Apphia breaks forth into singing ; Archippus gives solemn thanks to God. The Church in the house gathers quickly to receive the "good tidings from a far country," and to welcome the new-born brother into the holy family.

These circumstances we merely imagine and infer ; but there can be no question that the intercession of Paul with his friend had complete success. Least of all can there be a question of any sinner's safety who returns in the name of Jesus Christ, whom Paul preached, to the presence of God. Let him be assured of a profound and cordial welcome. There is joy in the Church on earth, and joy in the presence of the angels of God ; for all that dwell in heavenly places are made glad by one sinner who repents.

Perhaps some self-righteous one, even in Philemon's household, thought the joy uncalled for, and took umbrage at such interest being shown in one who had behaved so ill. He would shake his suspicious head, and say that it were better to wait awhile, and be quite sure that Onesimus was really changed. To forgive him so easily might encourage him to repeat the offence. So men grumble at the grace of the Gospel, and think that free forgiveness is a dangerous thing. So the elder brother in the Parable complained bitterly that the fatted calf was killed for his younger brother immediately on his return, whereas for him not even a little kid had been slain. But the Divine mercy is not to be checked by ungenerous suspicions ; it will rejoice at once, and exceedingly, over the sinner reclaimed. It was not to be apologised for as an amiable impulse ; it was the right thing to do ; "it was meet that we should make merry, and be glad ; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again ; and was lost, and is found." *

* Luke xv. 32.

HEBREWS.

EVERY student of the Bible recognises the immense value and significance of this book, as unfolding the relation of the New Testament to the Old. It is called an Epistle, and ends in the epistolary fashion ; but it begins like a treatise, and its general tenor is that of careful exposition and statement, with a view to instruction and comfort.

It is curious that the Revised Version retains the title—"The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews," for the manuscript authority for this is insufficient, and the Pauline authorship has been in dispute from the earliest times, and was rejected by Luther, Erasmus, and Calvin at the time of the Reformation. It is a question on which no absolute decision can be reached, for Christian antiquity was divided in opinion just as modern critics and commentators are. Origen could not find out the truth about it in the third century any more than we can in the nineteenth, and said, "As to who really wrote the letter, truly God knows." *

As to the dissimilarity between the work and the acknowledged Epistles of St. Paul we are not greatly moved by the change of topic or of argument, for the Apostle may have had much more versatility than our critics suppose. But we cannot account for the immense difference in style. That of the Epistle before us is more balanced and rhetorical, less eager and parenthetical, than was the manner of Paul. These sonorous sentences and rounded paragraphs are not his.

On the other hand, which of St. Paul's associates was capable

* In Euseb. : H. E. vi. 25.

of thinking out such a discourse as this? It must have been, if not himself, one of his circle, because of the allusion to Timothy at the close. It could not have been Luke, for we know his style, and it is quite different. There is some ancient sanction for the selection of Barnabas; but if the extant Epistle which goes under his name be genuine, it shows a great inferiority to this work both in thought and in diction. Apollos has been the favourite of modern conjecture ever since he was suggested by Martin Luther. He has this advantage, that, having left behind him no acknowledged works, he cannot be proved incapable of composing this Epistle; and the description of him in Acts xviii. 24 contains the very qualifications requisite.

It would unduly swell and burden our Lecture to treat this question in the extreme detail of which it is capable.* On the whole we are inclined to rest in the judgment expressed by Origen, as preserved for us by Eusebius. He thinks that the Greek of the Epistle is better than St. Paul's, but "the thoughts contained in it are wonderful, and do not fall behind those in the acknowledged letters of the Apostle. . . . I should say then that the thoughts are those of St. Paul, but that the words and the arrangement (*ἡ δὲ φράσις καὶ ἡ σύνθεσις*) are due to some one who set down from memory what the Apostle had said, and, as it were, commented on the utterances of his teacher."† No one is more likely to have done this great service than Apollos.

The "Hebrews," as distinguished from the Hellenists, seem to be Christian Jews of Palestine, in contrast with Christian Grecians, or Græcised Jews who were "scattered abroad." Those Hebrews, though acknowledging Jesus to have been the Christ, made a slow and reluctant transition from the Old economy to the New, and tenaciously clung for a considerable time to that very separation of Israel from the Gentiles, which

* A skilful statement of it, at once scholarly and succinct, may be found in Dr. A. B. Davidson's Short Commentary on this Epistle (1882).

† Euseb. Hist. Eccl. vi. 25.

the Church of God was to traverse and ignore. An instructive glimpse of their attitude is given in St. Luke's account of St. Paul's introduction to the Presbytery of Jerusalem,* on which occasion the presbyters impressed it on the missionary Apostle, that though the Gentiles had certain acknowledged liberties, the "thousands of Jews" who believed in Christ were "all zealous of the law." They seem even then to have supposed that the distinction of Jew and Gentile was to continue in the Church; the former occupying the higher platform, and "walking orderly" in the law; the latter on a lower level, indulged with easier regulations and conditions.

Those Hebrew Christians continued to resort to the temple in Jerusalem and to observe the sacred feasts; but after a time they were not permitted by the Jewish authorities to do so. They were treated as renegades and apostates, plundered of their goods, and cast out from those holy places which they and their fathers revered. It was a heavy blow and sore discouragement. Loving their nation, zealous for the law, devoted to the temple, they seemed to be, for their faith in Jesus, cut off from the commonwealth of Israel, and put into a worse position by far than their brethren of and among the Gentiles. It is this sorrow and perplexity which the writer of the Epistle recognises with sympathy; and he therefore makes it his object to strengthen and cheer the Hebrews, by showing them the mutual bearings of the Old Covenant and the New, and proving to them that they possessed as Christians far more than they had been deprived of,—a better priesthood, better altar, better sacrifice, and better sanctuary. From the promise of the writer to "see" those whom he addressed (chap. xiii. 23), it is inferred that they could not be the Hebrews of Palestine generally, but must have been grouped together in one city. Be it so. It is not possible, and were it possible, it would not be of much consequence to determine the place. Enough that the Epistle was directed to a Church composed of Hebrews exclusively, unmixed with Gentiles or even with Hellenists.

* Acts xxi. 18-25.

In course of the treatise, doctrine and appeal are mingled ; but, to speak generally, the former predominates in chaps i.-x. 18, and the latter in the remaining portion of the book.

I. The doctrine of the Epistle, adapted to reassure and fortify the discouraged Christian Hebrews, amounts to this: that though they should have to forfeit ancient privileges at the temple for the name of Jesus, they were gainers and not losers; they had the best portion and the highest worship; and as men of faith, they had communion with all the ancient believers who trusted in God.

Without preface, the writer at once discourses of the dignity of Jesus Christ the Son of God. In having Him for their Lord the Hebrews had one far greater than any of whom they and their fathers boasted.

1. *Greater than the Prophets* (chap. i. 1-3).—Alike in the former and the latter times, God had spoken: but in the days of old, the Divine communication to the fathers was “in the prophets,” whereas now it comes to us “in His Son.” The prophets were many; and the messages of God were conveyed to them, and delivered by them in many portions (not completely), and in various ways and measures. The Divine revelation through them was real and precious, but it was fragmentary, and preparatory to something better and more perfect. This was given when God sent His own Son, and spoke in Him, the Logos, and the Amen. Why then should the Christian Hebrews fear that they had lost Moses and the prophets? They had these still, and with them a prophet greater than them all—the Revealer of the Father, and Witness to the truth.

2. *Greater than the Angels* (chap. i. 4-ii.)—The Son of God, essentially and immutably Divine, is undeniably superior to the angels who are created beings. But not only so; Jesus, Son of man as well as Son of God, is elevated above angels in dignity and power. He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

The Jews boasted that their law was given by angels at Mount Sinai. But it is shown to the Hebrew Christians, that more glory belongs to the great salvation, as at first spoken by the Lord. Angels are bright spirits serving God and the heirs of salvation; but Christ is the heir of all. The world to come is put, not under the angelic servants, but under Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, who took for a little the place of a servant, and was made "lower than the angels for the suffering of death," but on that very account is "crowned with glory and honour," and constituted Lord of all.

3. *Greater than the Leaders of Israel—Moses and Joshua* (chap. iii.—iv. 13).—Here the Epistle touches a matter at once most delicate and most important. Dr. Saphir has said: "It is hardly possible for Gentiles to understand or realise the veneration and affection with which the Jews regard Moses, the servant of God. All their religious life, all their thoughts about God, all their practices and observances, all their hopes of the future: everything connected with God is with them also connected with Moses. He was to them the great apostle, the man sent unto them of God, the mediator of the Old Covenant."* The Christian Hebrews were in no wise to disown or disparage Moses; but are exhorted to consider a greater Apostle, or Sent One; not a servant, as Moses was, in the house of God, but the Son presiding over His own house. Let the dignity of Moses, his great services, and noble fidelity be fully acknowledged; yet Christ Jesus is worthy of more glory than he.

Moses was not able to lead the people into the Land of Promise. Joshua succeeded him, and planted the tribes victoriously in Canaan. Yet there is a rest, which the heart of man requires, into which no warrior, however devout and dauntless, can conduct. The Psalms pointed to this when speaking of a people entering into God's rest; and He who can give them such rest is a leader and commander greater than Moses or Joshua; this is Jesus Christ.

* Saphir's Lectures on Hebrews, p. 173.

4. *Greater than Aaron* (chap. iv. 14-x. 18).—The discussion of priesthood, involving the whole question of access to God in worship, forms the central theme in the Epistle. The Jews boasted much of the hereditary priesthood, and especially of the high priesthood in descent from Aaron. But such priesthood, though to be honoured as an ordinance of Jehovah, had an inherent defect. It was transferred from one man to another; and it was confined to a worldly sanctuary, not reaching into heaven. The Christian Hebrews are assured that they have risen and not fallen in the privilege of priesthood, for they have in Jesus, the Son of God, a Great High Priest, who fulfils all the essential conditions of the Aaronic priesthood, and greatly excels it inasmuch as He continues for ever in His office, and the sphere of its exercise is "heaven itself." * In that high sphere, He needs not to *stand* daily like the priests of Israel, ministering and offering the same sacrifices, for He has presented one all-sufficient sacrifice for sins, and therefore "has *sat* down on the right hand of God."

Having been contrasted with Aaron, our Lord is compared to Melchisedec, the royal priest of Salem in the days of Abraham. The chief point of similarity is that the priesthood is constituted by the Divine oath. It is therefore intransferable and inexhaustible, being "not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life." Why then should the Christian Hebrews be ashamed or alarmed at being disowned by the high priest and the council in Jerusalem? They had in their Saviour a merciful and faithful high priest, who could feel for their infirmities, succour them in trials, and "save to the uttermost" all who approached and worshipped God through Him, "because He ever lives to make intercession for them."

As we have observed, the question of the priesthood opens up the whole subject of access to God, of the purging of worshippers from sin, and their acceptance in worship. So the differ-

* See an important note on "the Priesthood of Christ" in Dr. A. B. Davidson's *Comm.*, pp. 146-154.

ence between the Old and New Covenants is explained, and the latter is shown to have the better promises and the more complete provision for Divine service. The sacrifice on the cross far transcends all the sin-offerings and burnt-offerings on altars under the law. The worshipper through Christ is purged from sins and perfected through His blood. He is admitted, not into "holy places made with hands," but into "heavenly places themselves." The veil being rent, he goes into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus. This discussion of access to God forms one of the most important sections of the Epistle, and helps more than any other part of Holy Writ to form and guide our minds on the relation of the two Testaments to each other, and on the perfecting of worshippers through one Supreme Offering, in contrast with their imperfection even under the divinely-instituted ritual of the prior dispensation.

II. When the writer has completed his statement on this subject, and shown that the Christian Hebrews needed not to concern themselves about admission to, or exclusion from, the Temple still standing at Jerusalem, he warmly appeals to them to stand fast in Christ, and not cast away their confidence (chap. x. 19, &c.) He addresses them as brethren who are admitted to a far nobler temple "by a new and living way," and who have a High-priest over the house of God. Thereupon he exhorts them to draw near to God in fulness of faith, to hold fast the profession of their hope, and to consider one another in order to incite themselves and others to love and good works. He also bids them, because they were cast out of synagogues, assemble themselves together for mutual exhortation; and warns them in the most solemn terms of the sin and doom of apostasy.

A saying of the book of Habakkuk, already quoted twice in the undoubted Epistles of St. Paul,* is cited here also—"The just shall live by faith." Then the mention of faith as the requisite principle of life and of patient endurance to the end,

* Rom. i. 17; Gal. iii. 11.

suggests and introduces a very impressive declaration of its vital and victorious power in the great and good of ancient times. The faith which lived and triumphed in them was a hearty reliance on God, and a confident persuasion of things unseen. It is shown that by such faith the ancient worthies pleased God, acted, endured, and conquered as His people. Thereupon the Hebrew Christians are exhorted, as in the presence of so many witnesses, to run their race, or press through their struggle with steadfastness, "looking unto Jesus," who is not merely an example of faith, but its "author and perfecter." So doing, they would not be at variance with the fathers and heroes of their nation, as the antichristian Hebrews alleged: they were treading in the steps of illustrious ancestors, and evincing an endurance similar to theirs. Let them, therefore, bear their affliction as chastisement sent in love; and let them look away from the most eminent servants to the pre-eminent Master, "Jesus, who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame."

In the course of his exhortation, the writer recurs to the contrast between the Old and New dispensations, and in a very grand passage (chap. xii. 18, &c.) likens it to the difference between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. The former was earthly, a mount that might be touched, and that was enveloped in the terrors of the law. The latter is the citadel of the Son of David, and is connected with the heavenly kingdom. Sinai may be taken on the way to Jerusalem, no doubt, but is far from it. Zion is at Jerusalem, the city of peace. At that "city of the living God" we are come to "myriads of angels in full assembly." The law was given at Sinai "by a disposition of angels;" but the tribes entered not into the company of those heavenly messengers, who brought no comfort to the people who were under the law, but rather increased the terror. Now all is changed under grace. The angels are "sent forth to minister to heirs of salvation;" and the worshipping Church is surrounded by the convocation of angels in their myriads,

who add their chorus to the song of the redeemed.* The tribes of Israel, God's first-born of nations, encamped at Sinai, and were numbered there. At Zion we are come to "the Church of first-born ones," not written on earth, but enrolled in heaven. The people at Sinai durst not approach God because He was terrible to them in the law of unperformed commandments. They were afraid that they should die. But at Zion, through the faith of the Gospel, we are come "to God the Judge of all," for we call on the Father, who, without respect of persons, judges according to every man's work. Thus also are we joined to the ancient believers—not parted from them. We are come to the spirits of just men, who without us could not be perfected, but now are perfected with us in Christ. We are brought into the august company of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets, with all the faith-pilgrims of pre-Christian times. We are come, not to Moses, the mediator of the old covenant, who stood between the law-giving Jehovah and the law-bound people, but to Jesus, the mediator of the new and better covenant; and not to that blood which Moses, as mediator, sprinkled at the inauguration of the first covenant, but to that precious blood—His own blood—which is sprinkled by the Mediator of the new on the book, on the sanctuary, and on the people.† It is added that this blood "speaks better things than Abel." The question for Cain and Abel was that of entering the presence of God, for they with their parents were exiles from the holy place. Abel did well to sacrifice a lamb, for there is no re-entrance without shedding of blood. By this sacrifice he, being dead, yet speaks. But the blood of sprinkling to which we are come speaks yet "better things"—gives assurance of full atonement made, and a way opened into the Holiest of all.

The end of the book is quite in the epistolary style, and in many turns of expression suggests to us the manner of St. Paul. It is occupied with brief counsels and admonitions; and its tone is impressive and affectionate. There are exhortations to

* See Rev. v. 11, 12.

† Exod. xxiv. 3-8.

brotherly love, hospitality, purity, contentment, respect for the leaders of the Church, thankfulness, and beneficence. "With such sacrifices God is well pleased." But still the main stress is laid on the duty of steadfastness in Christ. The Hebrews are to consider "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," and to bear reproach for His name. If they be cast out of the temple and synagogues, so let it be: they must "go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach."

We must repeat that this book should be read and interpreted throughout under a recollection of the fact that it was addressed to Hebrews, and skilfully adapted to the condition of the native Christians in Palestine a few years before the downfall of Jerusalem. Nevertheless the Epistle is most profitable to Gentile Christians also. The Bible of our religion is formed of the books of the Old and New Testaments; and it concerns us, even though our fathers never were under Moses, to know the order in which divine truth has been revealed to mankind, and divine privilege conferred on believers. Invaluable therefore to us is the book which explains more clearly than any other how the New Testament was enfolded in the Old, and the Old Testament is unfolded in the New.

Though we be Gentiles in the flesh, we become Abraham's children through faith; and we too are reached by the beautiful prayer of benediction which occurs very near the close of this Epistle. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead * our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, in order to do His will, Himself working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

* "This is the only place where our author mentions the resurrection. Everywhere else he lifts his eyes from the depth of our Lord's humiliation, passing over all that is intermediate, to the highest point of His exaltation."—DELITZSCH.

JAMES.

JAMES, the brother of John and son of Zebedee, died at Jerusalem as a martyr by the sword of Herod the king. James the brother of Jude, also called the Lord's brother,* son of Alpheus or Clopas, then became prominent in the apostolic band; and it was he, Peter and John, whom Paul recognised as pillars of the Church at Jerusalem. It appears from many passages that he exercised a presidency over the elders in that city.†

James the son of Alpheus seems to have devoted all his apostolic labour to Jerusalem. Resembling in tone and language one of the ancient prophets, he was commonly called "the Just," and revered for his devout habits and austere manner of life. With great courage and integrity he persisted in lifting up the testimony of Jesus among a population rapidly becoming demoralised, and rushing fanatically on their own destruction. His end was, like that of the elder James, by martyrdom; for he was stoned and beaten to death by the scribes and Pharisees before the last Roman siege of Jerusalem.

It was he who wrote this Epistle, "to the twelve tribes of

* The most probable explanation of this, in our opinion, is that Joseph and Alpheus were brothers, and that, on the death of the latter, Joseph took his widow and children under his own care. So James, Joses, Jude, and Simon, and their sisters grew up under Joseph as their foster father, and were regarded, according to undoubted Jewish usage, as the brothers and sisters of Jesus, Joseph's reputed son. After Joseph's death, Mary his widow, and Mary the widow of Alpheus, sisters-in-law, lived in close intimacy, their children growing up side by side; and when Jesus was crucified, these two Marys stood by. The sister of Mary the Blessed was Salome, the wife of Zebedee.

† Acts xii. 17, xv. 13, xxi. 18; Gal. ii. 9, 12.

the Dispersion." Though he had expressed the mind of the apostles and brethren at Jerusalem regarding the liberty of Gentile believers,* St. James never seems to have addressed himself in any way to the Gentiles. His use of the expression, "the twelve tribes," shows that he regarded those who were called Jews and Israelites in his time, whether dwelling in Palestine or scattered through the East, not as the mere descendants of Judah and Benjamin, but as the representatives of all the tribes of Israel, the tribal distinction of territory having been lost for many generations. The Epistle to the Hebrews was written to Christian Jews probably in Palestine; this, to Christian Israelites scattered over other lands; the first Epistle of Peter to those of the Jewish dispersion who dwelt in Asia Minor. These books form a trilogy; and though written without any concert, were probably composed about the same time, between A.D. 61 and 67.

We have found that, in order to interpret correctly the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is necessary to consider the state of Jewish Christians in Palestine at that period, and the trial of steadfastness through which they were obliged to pass. In like manner, for the interpretation of this Epistle, we ought to reflect on the position and temptations of Christian Israelites scattered through the cities of the Roman world. The revolt of the Jews against the Romans drew nigh. Everywhere they were in an impatient mood, scarcely caring to conceal their revolutionary spirit. The increasing severity of their heathen rulers provoked them to fanatical commotions and tumults. It was thus a jarring, threatening period. The national mind of Israel was in a state of fermentation and dangerous excitement; and in a few years there came the final rupture in that open war against the Imperial power, which ruined the Jewish State, and left Jerusalem desolate.

At such a time the position of the Christian Jews was a very difficult and delicate one. They loved their nation, and could not but be affected by the patriotic impulses which were at

* Acts xv. 13-21.

work in the breasts of their kindred. Yet they had been warned by the Lord Jesus of the impending fate of Jerusalem and the Temple; and knew that it was a suicidal course to provoke the Emperor and resist his armies. They themselves suffered at the hands of the heathen, being confounded by them with the non-Christian Jews; but they could not, as Christians, make common cause with their brethren after the flesh, for these were inflamed with a chimerical hope of Messiah appearing to deliver them from the Romans, whereas Christians knew and believed that the Messiah had already come, had been rejected by Israel, and had pronounced with tears the doom of their holy city. So the disciples of Christ among "the tribes scattered abroad" were forced to bear, not only the oppression of the heathen, but also the reproaches and upbraidings of their own countrymen for holding aloof from the revolutionary patriotic movement of the time.

St. James writes to comfort and admonish them. He does so as a Hebrew Christian and no more; as one who "walks orderly and keeps the law." Those whom he addresses are the people of God, not in a newly-formed relation or reconciliation, but according to a long-established and recognised national calling. He does not enter at all on the vocation or constitution of the Church of God, or on the doctrine of resurrection with Christ, and elevation to heavenly places in Him. What this Apostle does is to admonish such of his nation as acknowledged Jesus the Lord of glory, to keep the perfect law, or "do the word," as Jesus had taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Indeed the Epistle has much affinity with that beautiful discourse. It is ethical rather than theological. Patience, obedience, justice, charity, meekness of wisdom, lowliness, reliance on God in prayer, these are its great ideas.

The depreciation of this book by Martin Luther was caused by his rash assumption that it contradicts the doctrine of St. Paul on justification. There may be a superficial appearance of contradiction, but there is really no ground whatever for alleging collision and contrariety between these two Apostles.

The teachers from Jerusalem who obstructed the ministry of St. Paul, and, in one instance, misguided St. Peter, may have claimed to be champions of the views held by St. James, but clearly without warrant or authority, for they denied the Christian liberty of Gentiles, which he fully conceded, and they demanded the subjection of all disciples, of whatever origin, to the customs and laws of historic Judaism. This was not according to the mind of St. James; and it is worthy of notice that St. Paul, while denouncing those teachers, never says or implies that he himself differs from the Apostle James, for whom, indeed, he takes every opportunity of showing his respect. On the other hand, St. James never opposes or controverts St. Paul. He takes a smaller range than the Apostle to the Gentiles, and writes to a different class of readers, and for a somewhat different purpose. But the two supplement each other, and are in deep harmony as good and faithful servants of the Lord of glory.

The Epistle before us, assuming rather than stating the Christian doctrine and hope of salvation, inculcates what is right and seemly in Christian practice. It may be arranged in five parts, but not according to the usual five chapters.

I. *Exhortations for the time of trial* (chap. i. 1-18).

The Christian Israelites stood, as we have seen, in a position of great difficulty between the heathen who oppressed their nation and the great body of the Jewish nation itself, becoming every day more restless and discontented. They needed patience, wisdom, unwavering faith. If they felt a temptation to evil, they must not ascribe it to God, after the manner of those fanatical Jews who claimed Divine sanction for all their misdeeds. "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man." Evil is contrary to His nature, and detrimental to His glory. St. James falls back on thoughts already communicated by Christ,—“One is good, even God.” “Your Father in heaven is merciful.” “Your Father in heaven is perfect.” The Apostle ascribes to God supreme bounty. “All

good giving, and every perfect gift, is from above." And he points to the majestic purity and unchangeableness of God, "the Father of lights, with whom is no variation, or shadow cast by turning." As a great student of Scripture has said, "God is always in the meridian."

II. *Protest against religious formalism and pride* (chap. i. 19-ii.).

Pharisaism was the besetting sin of the Jewish religious mind, and it easily found its way into the Church. Christian converts from the twelve tribes had been wont to see a high reputation in religion sustained without purity of heart, weanedness from the world, or activity in love, and they required to be put on their guard against a sort of baptized Pharisaism, full of good profession, but barren of good fruit. Accordingly St. James warns them against irritation of temper, and coldness or negligence in obedience. Let the word of salvation be received in meekness, and obeyed with heartiness. A forgetful hearer does not receive the word into his heart, and is, as the Lord said, like a foolish man who built his house on loose sand. The contrast to him is a doing hearer who retains the word, not so much by force of memory as by practical obedience. He is "blessed in the doing;" for he is as the wise man who built his house upon a rock.

Another feature of Pharisaism was its contempt of the common people;* and this, too, was apt to reproduce itself in Jewish Christianity. There was a danger of extreme deference to rich and influential persons, while the poor were despised in the assembly or synagogue. The Apostle lifts a very distinct warning against this, showing it to be at variance with the royal law of love. He exhorts to brotherly kindness, not in manner and speech only, but in action. "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body,

* John vii. 48, 49.

what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

True faith evinces itself in fraternal consideration and charity. Dead and formal faith betrays itself in heartless selfishness. Such is the teaching of that famous passage (chap. ii. 14-26), which many writers have been at pains to "reconcile" with St. Paul's doctrine of gratuitous justification. But there is really no need of skilful, ingenious reconciliation. We have only to observe with common fairness the scope of each Apostle, in order to see that the one in no wise opposes or weakens the other's teaching. St. Paul, writing against legalists, affirms that a sinner is justified before God by grace through faith in Christ, without deeds of the law. St. James, writing against formalism, selfishness, and pride within the Church, declares that a Christian who says, "I have faith," and does not live and act as a believer ought, condemns himself. Words unsupported, and even contradicted by conduct, stand for nothing. Evidence is demanded that the faith professed is real, not pretended, living, not dead; and he who cannot produce such evidence is not justified as a Christian.

Both the Apostles allude to Abraham; and the references are of great importance to the interpretation. St. Paul shows that Abraham was justified by faith before Isaac was born. God counted him righteous. St. James refers to a period at least fifteen years later, and shows that the righteous Abraham was justified by works, *i.e.*, was proved to be a man of living faith when he "offered Isaac his son upon the altar."

The whole doctrine is contained under a beautiful figure once used by our Lord Jesus Christ. St. Paul teaches that we must be in union with Christ by faith, as the branch is in the vine, else we perish. St. James teaches that the branch which appears to be in the vine must bear fruit, else its union is a mere semblance, and it will be, as so much dead wood, cut away.

III. *Warning against bitterness and strife* (chaps. iii. iv. 12).

Boasting of faith without love is apt to be allied with overconfidence in teaching, and an excessive use of the tongue. The fanatical Jews in the Apostolic age seem to have multiplied teachers, and given unbridled license to disputation. St. James will have the Christian Jews on their guard against this evil. "My brethren, be not many teachers." It is a warning which English Christians of the present day may do well to consider, for there is an extraordinary *cacoethes docendi*, and all sorts of persons take upon themselves to deliver addresses on religious truth.

From this the Apostle is led to dilate on the duty of governing and taming the tongue. He describes it as "an unruly member" of the body, and an exciter of strife and bitterness. This part of the Epistle is marked by a profusion of telling illustrations. In rapid succession we have the horse controlled by the bit in his mouth; the great ship and small helm; the little spark and mighty fire; the taming of wild creatures of the air, on the land, and in the sea; the fountain of water; the fig-tree, the olive, and the vine. Indeed the whole book displays a fine combination of terseness in statement with bold imagination. It is nervous and strong in the body of its teaching, yet admirably relieved and illustrated by tropes and similes. It is also marked by pungent and memorable sayings, some of them worded with great precision and beauty: *e.g.*, the description of the sevenfold excellence of wisdom from above: "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial,* and without hypocrisy."

In the fourth chapter, the Apostle continues to inveigh against selfishness, bitterness, pride, and that love of the world which he, after the manner of the prophets, calls adultery. He insists on humility, and submission to God. He places before his readers as absolute contraries, God and the devil. So long as they resisted God, they drew nigh to the devil and became

* The translation of ἀδιάκριτος is uncertain. The Revised Version has "without variance." Dr. Farrar suggests "without vacillation." The word occurs here only.

subject to him. They ought to resist the devil, and draw nigh to God. There is also a strict forbiddal of calumny and detraction. "Speak not evil one of another, brethren." Alas that such admonitions should be needful! Yet needful they certainly are, for petty slander and evil speaking of brethren are constantly breeding mischief and unhappiness in Christian society. St. James here again falls back on the word spoken by our Lord. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged."* We cannot but form our private estimate, more or less favourable, of our brethren in the Lord: but judgment should be left to Him "who is able to save and to destroy."

IV. *Remonstrance against an arrogant spirit* (chap. iv. 13-v. 6).

One of the vain thoughts of man's heart is the presumption that he may map out his time at his own pleasure. St. James reminds us that time is to us quite uncertain; the duration of our life is beyond our control: "it is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." It is according, not as we will, but as the Lord Jesus Christ will, † that we live, "and do this or that."

Another display of arrogance was the oppression of the poor, an offence more than once referred to with displeasure in the Epistle. Though the law of Moses contained so many provisions for the protection of poor Israelites, it is evident, from the Gospel histories, that the rich Jews in the days of our Lord treated the poor with scorn. ‡ There was great danger of the same haughty spirit betraying itself among the Christian Israelites: and therefore the Apostle, very much in this instance also following the strain of ancient prophets, denounces avaricious men professing to be Christians, who ground the faces of

* Matt. vii. 1, 2.

† The letters D.V. should stand for *Domino* (not *Deo*) *Volente*. Jesus is "the Lord," and our times are in His hand.

‡ Luke xvi. 14, 19-21.

the poor and defrauded labourers of their hire. Here, too, he seems to recall the words of the Lord Jesus, "Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep." *

V. *Concluding admonitions* (chap. v. 7-20).

These relate to the patience of hope, intercessory prayer, and brotherly kindness.

The day of deliverance out of all distress is to be the day of the coming of the Lord. St. James teaches this exactly like St. Paul. For that day the Christians of the twelve tribes ought to wait patiently, cheered by the example of the prophets, and the deliverance of Job as narrated in their ancient Scriptures. In affliction they should pray. In joy they should "psalm," *i.e.* strike the chords of the lyre or harp, and sing. In sickness, they had resources unknown to those outside the Christian pale. "Let them call for the presbyters of the Church." † It is assumed, rather than enjoined, that the presbyters would anoint with oil, for such is the chief curative resource of Oriental nations; and it was better that the Christians should be thus attended to by their own elders, than that the physicians connected with the heathen priesthood should be called in. The elders would anoint "with oil in the name of the Lord:" and then the stress is laid on the prayer of faith which they would offer up

* Luke vi. 24, 25.

† How preposterous is the citation of this passage (chap. v. 14, 15) as a scriptural warrant for what is called in the Papal Church extreme unction, a sacrament supposed to convey grace to the souls of the dying—*sacramentum exeuntium*! The precept that elders, while anointing the sick with oil (words which virtually cover all sound medical prescriptions), should pray over them, is changed into a direction that a priest should come in when recovery is hopeless, for so the Council of Trent ordains, and should touch certain portions of the dying man or woman's body with oil, to prepare the soul for departure. The elders are altered into a priest; and the healing of the sick by remedies and prayer is turned into a sacramental ceremony by which a sick man is made ready, not to recover, but to die!

in the sick chamber. This would obtain, not only the healing of the body, but that forgiveness of sins without which indeed bodily healing is but an outward and temporary benefit. The sick brother was to confess and deplore his sins, and, on the prayer of the elders, he would be pardoned, and his soul "saved from death." It was the way of the great Physician Himself to heal by His word, though in some cases he touched the subjects of His cure, and even applied a simple remedy.* In one memorable instance, when He even raised the dead, He did so avowedly through the prayer of faith.† It was also His manner to combine bodily healing with spiritual recovery and the forgiveness of sins. Thus in raising up the paralytic at Capernaum, Jesus said to him, "Thy sins be forgiven thee;" and when He cured the infirm man at the pool of Bethesda, He bade him "sin no more."

As to the sick brother's confession of sin, it is surely with a wisdom higher than his own that the Apostle refrains from saying "Confess your sins to the presbyters," and generalises the exhortation thus, "Confess your faults one to another." Thus no sanction is given for the requirement of sacramental auricular confession to presbyters, much less to one priest in secret, who never reciprocates the confidence by confessing his faults in the ear of those who have unbosomed themselves to him. Christians are to confess to each other their faults against each other, in order to brotherly forgiveness and reconciliation.‡ They are also, when afflicted in body or burdened in conscience, to confess to each other, in brotherly confidence, their sins against God, in order that when they pray for one another, they may know what to pray for, and may make intercession with intelligence and sympathy, and not in mere vague and general terms.

The Epistle before us is unlike those of St. Paul, in having no salutations, messages to individuals, or allusions to personal history or friendship at the close. It ends with encourage-

* Matt. viii. 3, 15, ix. 29; Mark vii. 33; Luke xxii. 51; John ix. 6, 7.

† John xi. 41, 42.

‡ Matt. xviii. 21-35.

ment to the faithful to convert or recover any who had been deceived or beguiled into a departure from the truth, and had relapsed into the ranks of the Jewish opponents of the Gospel. He who by prayer and loving effort converted such a one, saved a soul from death, and covered that soul's multitude of sins with Divine forgiveness. Salvation of the soul, though a very common phrase now-a-days, is seldom mentioned in Holy Writ,* the mission of Jesus Christ having been not for souls merely, but for the redemption of men, for the salvation of sinners. But here, as we have seen, it is parallel to the healing of the body : and it is a boon so much greater, as the death which a soul can suffer exceeds in terror that which the body can endure.

What we have said of the Epistle to the Hebrews, may be repeated of this letter to the Twelve Tribes. It is written for our learning too, who are Gentiles after the flesh. We have need to cultivate patience, meekness, and a temper of loving obedience. We do well to learn the lesson from "James, the Lord's brother." Learning it, we also shall be of Jesus' family. "He stretched forth His hand towards His disciples, and said, Behold My mother and My brethren ! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." †

* The chief instances are Heb. x. 39 ; 1 Pet. i. 9.

† Matt. xii. 49-50.

I. PETER.

THE individual character of Simon Peter seems to be better known to us than that of any of the disciples of our Lord, illustrated as it is in many incidents of the evangelical narrative, and in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. The book before us was written in his old age ; and shows a heart warm as in his youth, a spirit still fervent and courageous, but combined with a deeper self-knowledge and humility. Here is Peter strengthening his brethren, as the Lord enjoined him.

The date of the Epistle is probably A.D. 64 or 65 : and the place of composition, Babylon. Whether this was the Eastern Babylon, or a cryptograph for Rome, is still a moot point among scholars.* The address is "to the sojourners of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." The expression, the *διασπορά*, was a well-understood designation of Israelites scattered among the Gentiles. There are not wanting in the Epistle indications of a recognition of Gentile Christianity : † but it is certainly intended as a communication to the Jewish Christians in Asia Minor. There is obvious propriety in this ; for, (1.) Simon Peter was the Apostle of the circumcision, as Paul of the uncircumcision. Therefore, while not at all denying the standing of Gentile believers in the Church, he writes to those whom his apostolic ministry specially embraced. (2.) It was from the lips of Peter that Jews and proselytes from the regions of Asia Minor first heard the Gospel at Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost ; and it was most fitting that he should undertake to instruct and exhort

* Our latest critics, *e.g.*, Renan, Farrar, Lumby, and Salmon, pronounce in favour of Rome ; but Dean Howson gives good reasons for the contrary opinion.—*Horæ Petrinæ*, pp. 131-135, and App. C. † Chap. ii. 9. 10.

those early converts, and such as had been added to their number in the years that had elapsed since they received the word of the Lord and were baptized.

St. Peter announces himself "an apostle of Jesus Christ," not a prince of apostles, but one of the twelve. In neither of his Epistles is there the slightest trace of that love of title and pre-eminence which has been so conspicuous in the bishops of Rome who pretend to be his successors.

There is no allusion to the organised Churches of Asia Minor, because the letter is intended for "the Dispersion;" and in the Churches Jews and Gentiles were united. There is, however, reference to "the elders," and their episcopate of the flock of God.

It is easy to see that the Apostle's object is to confirm the Jewish Christians throughout Asia Minor in the faith and hope which some of them had received at Jerusalem under his own ministry, and which had been widely diffused through the labours of Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and other preachers. Therefore the Epistle is not at all a doctrinal treatise, but, recognising fundamental truths, and often reaching back into the Old Testament by quotation and allusion, it seeks to establish its readers in their Christian convictions and patient confidence: "I have written briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand."

In fact, this letter much resembles an earnest, and sometimes impassioned, oral address, and can scarcely be said to have a distinct topical arrangement. The salutation is grave and consolatory. The Jews had always been taught to trace their religious calling and privilege to the Divine election of their nation. St. Peter ascribes the yet higher calling and privilege of those among them who believed in Jesus Christ to their election, "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." Their position in Christ was due to Divine electing love, as truly as their prior position as children of Abraham and disciples of Moses. Nothing less than the grace of the Holy Trinity made them Christians; for

the choice and foreknowledge of God the Father led to "sanctification of the Spirit," and "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

After the address and salutation, the Epistle proceeds as follows:—

I. A statement of salvation in Christ, and of the influence which the possession of such a salvation ought to have on character and life (chap. i. 3—ii. 10).

Most characteristically this Apostle rushes at once into an animated passage on the Christian hope and the inheritance of saints. He then cheers "the sojourners of the Dispersion" among their manifold trials by assurances of the abounding mercy of God, His powerful keeping of believers, and the triumphant issue of well-tried faith at the appearing of Jesus Christ. In this exordium we find faith, hope, and love—these three, after the manner of Paul. The saints are "kept through faith;" they have a trial of faith; and the end of their faith is "the salvation of souls." They are "begotten again to a living hope by the resurrection of Christ." They have love to the unseen Saviour in whom they believe. Faith is not enough without hope and love, or hope without faith and love, or love without faith and hope. But from the three issues "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

St. James looked on the Gospel as "the perfect law of liberty." St. Peter regards it as the accomplishment of prophecy, and so places it before his readers in a light which they were sure to appreciate. He affirms that what was now being preached with the accompanying power of the Holy Ghost was no strange thing. It had been the subject of prophetic testimony in the past, and even of angelic contemplation and study. So this Apostle had taught in all his addresses to the Jews;* and he repeats it here to the believers of "the circumcision," in order to enhance the value and confirm the truth of that great salvation which he had orally proclaimed.

* Acts ii. 16–36, iii. 18–26, iv. 11.

As to the way of salvation in Christ, St. Peter is quite in harmony with St. Paul; has the same doctrine of atoning blood, of resurrection to newness of life, and of the edification of the saved as living stones built together into "a spiritual house." He does not, however, enter at all so fully into the ground of salvation, or discuss such points as reconciliation, justification, and adoption. Neither has he any of the anti-Judaizing polemics, so prominent in some of the Pauline Epistles. What St. Peter is most intent upon is the practical influence which ought to be exerted on character and conduct by the conscious possession of salvation in Christ. Christians should be resolute, vigilant, patient, obedient, holy, full of brotherly love, a people publishing by their lives the attributes of Him who has called them "out of darkness into His marvellous light." It is not that men are to live well in order to be saved, but that they should live well because the God of all grace has saved them. On this the teaching of the Epistle is very definite. Christian pilgrims on the earth, are to pass the time of their sojourning in reverence toward God, "forasmuch as they know that they are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ." They are to love one another because they are partakers of the same regeneration, "being born again of incorruptible seed." They are to live to the Divine praise, because they are the people of God, and have obtained mercy. They are to lay aside all ungraciousness of temper, forasmuch as they "have tasted that the Lord is gracious."*

II. More definite exhortations as to holy living in the world (chap. ii. 11-iv. 19).

The Apostle seems to come closer to his readers; addresses them as "beloved;" and affectionately urges them to live as those who were delivered by Jesus Christ from this present evil world. They should not give rein to fleshly lusts, as the heathen did around them. Bearing in mind that the reputa-

* They are also to desire for their growth "the milk," which is for the understanding (*λογικόν*), and for the affections (*ἄδολον*).—Chap. ii. 2.

tion of the Gospel was committed to them, they should give no sort of colour or countenance to allegations freely brought against the early Christians of immoral excesses and orgies, and of insubordination and disloyalty. On the latter of these charges, as well as the former, St. Peter is very careful to put the Jewish Christians on their guard. He teaches the duties of subjects to the civil government, and then of servants to masters in domestic government. It was a time of harshness and oppression, and the patience of subordinates was severely tried. The Apostle directs and comforts them by pointing to the perfect model of a sweet and holy patience in Jesus Christ suffering for us, and "leaving us an example that we should follow His steps." From this he proceeds, after the manner of Paul, to discuss the mutual relation of husband and wife; and shows how in this also Christians ought to live as the Lord's servants and handmaids, raising the conjugal union, and the family life consequent upon it, far above what was usual among the Gentiles who knew not Christ. Then follows a general admonition to kindness, courtesy, hospitality, and the encountering of enmity and persecution in the world with a good conscience and a tranquil heart.

In this part of the Epistle there are sudden stretches of thought far back into the Old Testament. The submission of the Christian wife to her husband is recommended from the example of "holy women in the old time," and especially of Sarah, who "obeyed Abraham, calling him lord." The long-suffering of God while His people are ill-treated in the world is compared to His long-suffering "in the days of Noah while the ark was a preparing." Salvation itself is illustrated by the preservation of Noah and his family, "eight souls," in the ark by the waters of the flood. Both here and in his second Epistle St. Peter dwells with emphasis on the history of Noah and the Deluge. He sees judgment brooding over the world, and especially over the Jewish people, and Jerusalem, their holy city. There is deliverance only in and with Christ. And in the Apostle's ears there still ring with solemn sound those

words which many years before he had heard from his Master's lips : " As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away ; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." *

Then the manner of salvation, as well as the necessity for it, is taught from the history of Noah. He was delivered " by water," passed through the death in which others were swallowed up, was concealed or buried out of sight for a time, and then emerged as by resurrection to render to God his sacrifice of praise. So are we saved by baptism into the death of Christ, by burial with Him through " baptism into death," and by resurrection with Him who is risen and gone into heaven. Then and therefore have we good cause to offer our sacrifice of praise to God continually.

But the reference which is most frequent and emphatic is to the suffering and dying of the Lord Jesus. The message is : Suffer innocently and patiently ; for so Christ endured. Rejoice that you are partakers of His sufferings. There had been a time when Simon Peter tried to dissuade his Master from going up to Jerusalem to suffer ; and at that city he drew the sword to resist his Master's arrest in the garden of Gethsemane ; but now he better understood the sorrow in the garden and the anguish of the cross, for he saw the salvation of the world and the patience of the Church centering in and secured by that meek and willing Sufferer.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews troubled Christians are bidden to look for strength to the sympathising Saviour in heaven, " for He is able to succour them that are tried." In this Epistle they are exhorted to recall their Lord's passion on earth, and learn patience from His example. They are also to rejoice in hope of glory at His coming. St. Paul had written to the Romans, " If so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also

* Matt. xxiv. 37-39.

be glorified together." St. Peter has the same thought, "that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." *

This part of the Epistle ends with a word of encouragement to such of the Jewish Christians in Asia Minor as were in suffering, to commit to God "the keeping of their souls in well-doing." Jesus suffered at the hands of men "for well-doing," not "for evil-doing;" and on the cross He committed Himself to Him that judges righteously. So should His people, not in dying only, but in all time of trial. Whatever it may cost, whatever risks it may involve, let them keep to well-doing; and as they have received in faith the salvation of their souls, so let them commit the keeping of their saved souls in the right way to the "faithful Creator," whose "will" is concerned in their affliction, no matter whence it arises, and whose loving wisdom can always evolve out of it good to His afflicted ones, and glory to His holy name.

III. Councils to Presbyters, and to the people in Christian fellowship (chap. v.).

In the opening of the Epistle, St. Peter takes the title of apostle; but the apostolate was not an office to be continued in the Church. Apostles were gifts to the Church, not officials. The permanent office of superintendence is, as we have elsewhere learned, that of presbyterate or episcopate.† So St. Peter, in addressing those who occupied that office, calls himself their "co-presbyter," and bids them "feed the flock of God, *episcopising* it." ‡ Without doubt he has in mind the charge he had himself received from the Lord,—“Feed My lambs :

* Chap. iv. 13; Rom. viii. 17.

† What do they mean who assert that no definite mode of Church government is prescribed in the New Testament? We have been anxious not to give any undue prominence to the subject, yet we have been obliged to take notice of it in the Acts of the Apostles, in three of St. Paul's Epistles (Philemon, 1 Timothy, and Titus), and here also. Everywhere the testimony is clear for the presbytero-episcopate as the proper government of the Church.

‡ Chap. v. 2.

keep My sheep: feed My sheep." He has no thought of bequeathing the charge to one supreme bishop at Rome or anywhere else. He transmits it to all the presbyters, bidding them regard the Christian people, not as their flocks or followers, but as the flock of God, and both tend and nourish that flock as they shall be answerable to the Divine "Shepherd and Bishop of souls." Their episcopate should be exercised not reluctantly, but with cheerful good-will; not covetously, but of a ready mind; and not overbearingly, "as lording it over their charge, but as patterns to the flock." Not by domineering authority are the Lord's people to be led, but by the charm of Christ-like goodness, the attraction of love, the beauty of holiness.

A cheering promise is given to presbyters who are gentle and faithful toward the flock: "When the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive the amaranthine crown of glory." When the Lord comes He will reckon with all who have had place as overseers and guides to His sheep and lambs, and will crown them, or not crown them, according to their fidelity. A hireling shepherd may get what he seeks—filthy lucre; but he will have no crown. A lover of pre-eminence may lord it for a little while, but he will be put among the last and lowest when Christ appears. The dutiful elder or diligent bishop may or may not have appreciation now; but his reward is sure when the Archpastor or Archbishop, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, returns in glory.

Direction follows for mutual loving subjection in the Church, though the word church is avoided throughout the Epistle; * and to this are added exhortations similar to those given by St. James, to humility before God and steadfast resistance to the devil, who, as a roaring lion, threatened to devour the Christians, going about to deter them, and to foment cruel persecution against them.

The closing benediction is very beautiful. It is invoked

* An awkward fact for the Romanists. When will a Pope write a letter full of the meekness of Christ, and without once mentioning the Church?

from "the God of all grace." St. Peter does not, like some of our modern enthusiasts, speak of "Jesus only." * He represents it as the object of Christ's suffering, "that He might bring us to God;" and of His resurrection and glory, "that your faith and hope may be in God." His readers are to "call on the Father." They "believe in God," "are the people of God," are to "sanctify the Lord God" in their hearts, are to "live according to God in the Spirit." So their guardian is "the God of all grace," whose resources of goodness and love, wisdom and power, no human need can ever exhaust. Having "called us to His eternal glory in Christ," this God will unquestionably guard and support us all the way to His eternal glory, and not permit any of us to fail. The Apostle's petition is, that after the brethren "have suffered a little while," the God of all grace may make them perfect. Or rather, for the amended Greek Text gives this as a strong assurance and promise instead of an optative benediction, we read in the R. V. : "The God of all grace Himself shall perfect, stablish, strengthen you."

"To Him, the God of all grace, be the dominion to the ages of the ages. Amen." Let all the people of the Lord say Amen. Let none of them seek their own glory or boast of their own might; but let all, catching the spirit of this precious Epistle, hope in God, live in the world as pilgrims, and wait patiently for Christ.

The last words of the book appear to recall some of the parting words of the Saviour before He died. St. Peter had heard his Lord say, "Love one another as I have loved you;" and he writes, "Greet ye one another with a kiss of love." He had heard the Lord say, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace;" and he writes, "Peace be with you all that are in Christ."

* When the prophets disappeared on the Mount of Transfiguration, the three disciples saw Jesus only. But how puerile to found on this a sort of theological direction!

A TABLE

OF REMINISCENCES OF JESUS AND HIS WORDS IN THE
EPISTLES OF ST. PETER.

I. PETER.

Compare Chapter i. 3,	with John xx. 1 ;	Mark xvi. 7.
”	” 8,	” ” 29.
”	” 10, 11,	” Luke xxiv. 26, 46.
”	” 19,	” John i. 29, 36.
”	” 23,	” Matthew xiii. 23.
”	” ii. 1, 2,	” ” xviii. 1-4.
”	” 4, 5,	” ” xvi. 18.
”	” 7, 8,	” ” xxii. 42-44.
”	” 13, 17,	” Mark xii. 13-17.
”	” 20, 23,	” ” xiv. 54-65.
”	” 25,	” Luke xv. 3-7 ; John x. 11-16.
”	” iii. 15,	” Mark xiv. 66-72.
”	” 19,	” Luke xvi. 23.
”	” iv. 7,	” Mark xiii. 35-37.
”	” 8,	” John xv. 12.
”	” 14,	” ” xiv. 26, 27 ; xv. 18-21.
”	” v. 2,	” ” xxi. 15, 18.
”	” 5,	” ” xiii. 4, 5.
”	” 6,	” Luke xiv. 11.
”	” 7,	” Matthew vi. 31-34.

II. PETER.

Compare Chapter i. 14,	with John xxi. 18, 19.	
”	” 16-18,	” Mark ix. 2-8.
”	” ii. 1,	” ” xiii. 22.
”	” 5,	” Matthew xxiv. 37-39.
”	” 6,	” ” xi. 23, 24.

II. PETER.

THE authenticity and authority of this book have been much disputed. Some of the early versions of the New Testament do not contain it; and though its existence can be traced certainly to the second century, its right to be received as Holy Scripture was not established till the formation of the Canon in the fourth century. Origen and Jerome themselves received it, but state that it was rejected by many. In modern times its Petrine authorship is utterly denied by not a few scholarly critics, some of them at all events not chargeable with neology. Calvin expressed doubt on the point; De Pressensé has said of it, "It seems to us impossible to admit with any certainty its authenticity;"* and Godet thinks that it must be excluded, "if not from the Canon, at least from the number of the genuine apostolic books."†

Whatever the degree of weight due in such a matter to the hesitation of the early Church, the Epistle shows itself intrinsically worthy of its place in the New Testament. It has, we admit, many points of dissimilarity with the undisputed first Epistle; but it may very well be a sequel to that communication, and indeed it is just such a sequel as the state of the Asiatic Churches at that period would have required. Why imagine a pseudo-Peter of a later generation writing such a book as a

* "Early Years of Christianity," Eng. Ed., Note I.

† "Studies on the New Testament," Eng. Ed., p. 204.

The unsparing assault on this Epistle made by Dr. E. A. Abbott in the *Expositor* for 1882 created a painful sensation. He has, however, been well answered by Dr. George Salmon, *Introd. to N.T.* pp. 626-633.

cunning fabrication under the Apostle's name—an anonymous writer, so gifted and yet so false?

The book professes to be composed by the Apostle Peter shortly before his martyrdom. It is addressed to believers in Christ, without any specific direction, as in the first Epistle, to Jewish converts in Asia Minor. Its character is hortatory, not argumentative or even didactic. The first Epistle was written to fortify Christian brethren in the endurance of afflictions from without. This bids them watch against dangers within the Church, in the form of deceptive teachers and mocking sceptics, who would turn them away from the hope of the Gospel.

The exordium is almost as vigorous and fervid as that of the first Epistle; and illustrates the same tendency of St. Peter's mind to rush at full force into his theme. Those to whom he writes had "obtained precious faith,"—equally precious with that of the apostles and first servants of the Lord. It was faith "in the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;" the clinging attachment of the heart to the righteous Father, and to that Just One, who is our way to the Father. To all who in this sense believed the divine power had imparted, and continued to give, all requisites for life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who had called them. To them were given the promises of God, very great and precious, with a view to the promotion of holiness: "that by these ye might become partakers of a divine nature, having escaped from the corruption which is in the world by lust."

When the Apostle mentions the divine promises, his soul seems to kindle. In earlier days he had been too confident in his own promises; as when he said, "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I. If I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee in any wise." But he learned his own weakness when the cock crew; and in old age he makes no mention of the promises of men, but extols the unfailing promises of God.

The possession of precious faith lies at the foundation of Christian dispositions and life. St. Peter exhorts the believers to diligence in the culture of such dispositions, and the develop-

ment of such a life. They who are joined to Christ in faith, and have received the promises, ought to add in their faith moral courage; in this again, knowledge; in knowledge, self-control; in self-control, patient endurance; in patience, godliness; in godliness, *philadelphia*; and in brotherly kindness, love. Thus seven good qualities are to be built on "precious faith," superadded to it or developed from it within the character of a diligent Christian. On the contrary, a negligent Christian adds nothing to his faith, and therefore loses its advantage and comfort, is blind to his position and calling, has a contracted view of the things of God, and, forgetful of the pardon of sins which he received on faith, lives in uncertainty of mind and inconsistency of conduct. The Apostle encourages the brethren to escape from mischievous uncertainty by assiduous self-culture; to become assured and happy believers, waiting for an entrance with unflinching step into the kingdom of our Lord.

After this, for confirmation of faith and an incentive to diligence, St. Peter refers to the testimony of apostles and the writings of ancient prophets. The apostles had not followed reports or myths of vague authority, but had been companions of Jesus Christ. Simon Peter himself, with two others, had seen the Master's glory in the Transfiguration, and heard the voice of God "on the holy mount." After the resurrection, the Lord had indicated to him that he was to die a martyr's death of violence; and he was the more anxious to impress the truths of the Gospel on the younger generation around him, in order that, after his decease, they might "have these things always in remembrance." There is something very significant in the Apostle's language about putting off his tabernacle, taken along with his allusion to his presence at the Transfiguration. On the mount he had proposed to build tabernacles, in order to retain Jesus, Moses, and Elias in heavenly majesty on the earth—"not knowing what he said." But now he knew a more excellent way. He would put off his own tabernacle, and, when absent from the body, be present with the Lord.

The testimony of ancient prophecy was that which our Saviour,

after the resurrection, opened to His disciples ; and, if we may judge by the reports we have of St. Peter's addresses at Jerusalem, he followed his Master's example, and repeated His interpretations. Such teaching suited the Jewish mind ; and Christians "of the circumcision" received much confirmation of their faith from giving heed to the sure word of prophecy. St. Peter reminds them that the "prophecy of the Scripture" is not a prognostication of the future by far-seeing human minds, but the utterance of holy men under the impulse of the Holy Ghost, going quite beyond their personal knowledge or suggestion. To the same effect is his statement in the first Epistle, that the prophets themselves searched "what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify."

As we pass into the second chapter, we find the tone of this book changed from grave exhortation to stern warning and even severe denunciation. Having set before the brethren the light to which they should take heed, the Apostle puts them on their guard against false lights that would lure them to destruction. There had been pseudo-prophets among the people of Israel ; and in like manner there would be pseudo-teachers in the Church. The Lord Himself had said, "Beware of false prophets." St. Paul gave warning that such should arise. St. John and St. Jude describe them as already producing a baneful effect on Christian faith and life. St. Peter here points out their pernicious ways, and affirms their doom. Those who should "bring in heresies (*i.e.* divisions) tending to destruction," he stigmatises as denying "the Lord," for by their wilfulness and disobedience they would set aside all His authority. Their chief lure would be licentious living, and their chief motive would be avarice. History soon showed that such warnings were required ; for in the end of the first century, and in the second, teachers appeared, and sects were formed, that brought infamy on the Christian name by their unruly principles and shameless lives.

The Apostle pronounces the doom of those wicked men, establishing the certainty of retribution by reference to three great judgments of God :—

(1.) The angels that sinned God spared not ; but, having cast them down to Tartarus or the Abyss, holds them there in bonds of darkness. Those fallen angels are now “reserved unto judgment.”

(2.) The old world, filled with corruption and disorder, God spared not, but swept it with a deluge in judgment, preserving “Noah the herald of righteousness, an eighth person,” *i.e.* at the head of the entire preserved company of “eight souls,” as already described in the first Epistle.*

(3.) The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah God condemned to overthrow, † burning them to ashes ; and delivered Lot, a righteous man, who had witnessed with disapproval and vexation the vile deeds of the people among whom he dwelt.

These instances are adduced to prove that “the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment.” He will not permit trouble to be so prolonged as to crush the spirit of His people. He knows when and how to deliver them by shutting them up in some ark of safety, or making them flee betimes to His mountain of strength. On the other hand, though the unjust may seem to have long impunity, they cannot elude the judgment of God. The hand of His justice, invisible but irresistible, has hold of them every moment, and will keep its hold till the day of judgment and fiery indignation.

Woe, woe to all who demoralise Christian society ! Such is the tenor of this chapter, and of the Epistle of Jude. Woe to those who obliterate the distinction between Christian and heathen life, encouraging licentiousness, despising authority, indulging a railing, contemptuous spirit, and attending the love feasts of the Church with impure eyes and hearts ! Their course is in harmony with the vile counsel of the prophet Balaam, who was the anti-Moses of his time, and prevailed against Israel, not by direct attack, but by a crafty and licentious device. In his steps walked those antichristian men who beguiled and corrupted unstable souls. That they had known Christ made

* 1 Peter iii. 20.

† The word used is “catastrophe.”

their wickedness all the worse. "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, having known it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered unto them." They betrayed an inward baseness and uncleanness of soul which suggested a comparison with animals which were counted vile by the children of Israel. "It has happened unto them according to the true proverb,* the dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

The chapters in this Epistle are not ill arranged. At the beginning of the third, we find a pause or rest in the fervid, even fiery diction of the Apostle. But he soon resumes the strain of denunciation with reference to that scoffing spirit which should manifest itself "in the last of the days." He shows, according to his manner, that this had been predicted by ancient prophets who had prevision of the Christian times. That scoffing spirit would be in alliance with the libertine tendency already treated of; and it would show itself under the form of materialistic scepticism, asserting the stability of nature, and deriding the thought of any serious disturbance of the order of the universe by an appearing of the Lord from heaven.

The Apostle remarks that they who so speak forget the changes which have already passed over the face of nature: and does not hesitate to say that, as those who ridiculed the warnings of Noah were refuted by the judgment of water, so those mockers of the last days shall be refuted by the judgment of fire.

Is it inferred from the long periods that elapse, that the Lord God is slow in action, or slack in fulfilment of His word? The answer is ready: "Let this one thing not escape you, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." † Before the Lord time is not as with us. Bengel says, "God's *ænologium* differs from the *horologium* of mortals."

* "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly."—Prov. xxvi. 11. No doubt there is a reminiscence of Matt. vii. 6.

† Chapter iii. 8. The latter part of this verse is taken from Psalm xc. 4.

We have an hour-dial, but the Everlasting One has an age-dial, on which He evolves His eternal purposes.

The true moral interpretation of God's long delay in judgment is furnished in the following words, "He is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." God showed His longsuffering before the flood, when His Spirit strove with man; before the destruction of the cities of the plain, whose wickedness He endured till in all Sodom there were not ten righteous men; before the expulsion of the Canaanites, whom He tolerated for hundreds of years, till their iniquity was full; before the captivity of Israel and of Judah, with whom He remonstrated and pleaded by the voices of many prophets; and before the downfall of Jerusalem, over the infatuation of whose inhabitants were shed the precious tears of His only begotten Son. In similar forbearance He allows length of days to notorious sinners; sends repeated admonitions to their consciences, and prolongs their opportunities of repentance.

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." Forbearance may be long, but it will end abruptly. Then comes sudden judgment, with crashing ruin and a blazing sky. The earth itself, on the stability of which the scoffers count so confidently, will be wrapped in all-dissolving fire. How long or short will be that day of judgment no mortal man can tell. We are warned not to apply the scale of human days to the day of God. But what it most concerns us to know, is that the day will come surely and suddenly. There is a likelihood that it will be brief, just because the judgment is to be so strong and sweeping; for it has been the way of the Lord, while prolonging the discipline of chastisement for His children's good, and the time of repentance for the return of sinners, to make a short work of judgment on the earth.

Having warned the scoffers, St. Peter concludes by exhorting

the believers to vigilance and piety. What is to other men a fearful prospect should be by them expected with a solemn joy. It is incumbent on them to use well the present time, and serve Christ with diligence during this period of toil and struggle on the part of the Church, patience and longsuffering on the part of God. The saints should look for, and by their longings speed forward the appearing of the day of God. Their hopes reach quite through, and past the dissolution of this present visible *cosmos*, to a new creation, or construction of the heavens and earth, of which the glory will be that "therein dwelleth righteousness."* On the present earth, righteousness lives by dint of constant watchfulness and prayer; for it is in an ungenial atmosphere, the world being full of unrighteous men and their unrighteous deeds. On the new earth, righteousness shall dwell at home; having not a place in the world by sufferance, but the whole world to itself. There will be matter, but no materialists; sense, but no sensualists; men dwelling in bodies without the lusting of the flesh, and on an earth without an earthly mind. There will be no devil or demon in heaven, or air, or earth; no unclean spirit, or ungodly man. The people will be all righteous, and the Lord their God will dwell among them: "His people they; and He His people's God."

In addressing and exhorting the saints, St. Peter makes an interesting reference to the teaching of his "beloved brother Paul." Perhaps some of the erroneous teachers of the time, keeping alive and exaggerating the report of the difference between those apostles at Antioch, were wont to represent them as at variance in the doctrine of salvation. We know that this is quite the mode of some of our modern critics, who describe the Pauline theology as very different from the Petrine, and from the Johannine. They construe variety as though it were discrepancy, and views which are the complement of each other, as though they were in contradiction. How condemna-

* Chapter iii. 13; the promise is in Isa. lxx. 17; the vision in Rev. xxi. 1.

tory of their conclusions is this circumstance, that St. Peter refers his readers to the writings of St. Paul! It plainly appears, (1.) That St. Peter loved and honoured the apostle who had once "withstood him to the face," knowing how to distinguish the faithful wound of a friend from the cruel stab of an enemy; (2.) That the writings of St. Paul were, at that early period, regarded as of authority, not merely in the particular Churches to which they were sent, but in the Church at large; (3.) That although there are acknowledged difficulties in the Epistles and in other Scriptures, and though these are misinterpreted by incompetent persons, no argument ought to be founded thereon against the right and duty of appeal to Holy Writ. No composition has been so twisted and wrested as Sacred Scripture. So much the worse for those who misuse it. It is "to their own destruction;" but the Scriptures cannot be destroyed, and to them should all religious questions be taken with competent learning and spiritual power of insight. The ultimate rule of faith is not what the commentators say, or what the fathers teach, but what the Lord has said, and what the beloved Paul, beloved Peter, or other apostle or prophet has written for our learning under the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

Once more St. Peter uses the word "beloved," affectionately warning the believers not to be "led away." It is the very expression used by St. Paul in regard to Barnabas at the time when Peter "was to be blamed;"* but the danger was now in the opposite direction. Barnabas had been led away by the error of those who exaggerated the office and obligation of the law. Those whom St. Peter warns were in danger of being led away by the error of "the lawless" or Antinomians. He indicates the great corrective of all such perversions in the memorable words—"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ:" in the grace or favour of the Lord, as trees and flowers grow in the sunshine, bearing fruit, and shedding fragrance; in the knowledge of the Lord, learning

* Gal. ii. 13.

Christ and the truth as it is in Jesus, in order to stability in faith and integrity of life.

“To Him—our Lord and Saviour—be glory both now and to the day of the age!”* From Him descends all grace. To Him redound all glory!

* Chap. iii. 18 : a unique expression, probably suggested by verse 8.

I. JOHN.

THIS book is called, properly enough, an "Epistle general," for it has no specific direction to any local Church, and takes no notice of any distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Its date is fixed with great probability about the year A.D. 90. At that time Peter, James, and Paul had departed to be with the Lord; of all the apostolic band only John survived, and with deep fatherly affection surveyed the whole Church of God. His writing is parental and even tender in its tone, but never weak or timorous. The aged John is still a "son of thunder." As in his Gospel, so also in this Epistle, he gives much prominence to the eternal life which we have in Christ, and the sonship of Christians in and under the Divine Sonship of their Lord. He keeps the eye fixed on the glory of the Son with the Father, and denounces all doctrines and theories subversive of that glory.

It is by no means easy to analyse this book, and arrange its contents in sections; and the difficulty arises from the habit of St. John's mind to revolve round a few central thoughts, and to pour out intuitions, rather than conduct discussions or build up arguments. Life, light, love, sonship, righteousness, knowledge, faith, victory over the world—such are his favourite and often reiterated themes.

The proem or exordium (chap. i. 1-4) is in obvious affinity to that of St. John's Gospel.* It starts from a lofty summit

* There is much to recommend Bishop Lightfoot's suggestion that this Epistle was prepared and circulated as a companion work to the Fourth Gospel. The mention of "the water and the blood" would have been unintelligible without the narrative of the crucifixion by the same Apostle.

of Christian truth; and declares the Logos, the manifested Life, the Son in the bosom of the Father. With this high doctrine, and this Divine Personality, the Church had to do "from the beginning:" but at the end of the first century, there were teachers who pretended to go beyond and soar above the elements of Christianity as known to the original disciples. These the Apostle withstood, desiring to keep the Church faithful to the primitive simplicity, and to that Prince of Life whom he had himself so intimately known. To continue in the faith and knowledge of this eternal life would be to enjoy fellowship with the apostles. To depart from this would be to forfeit all such privilege. The very object of St. John in writing was, that the holy fellowship might be preserved joyful and inviolate.

The key to the whole interpretation lies before us in the words, "These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." The object of the Epistle is Christian joy: and this is found (1.) In fellowship with God and the apostles and saints, under certain conditions of fellowship here described; and (2.) In victory over the world, and over the spirit of error therein.

I. Fulness of joy is attainable only in the fellowship * which follows on union to Christ, and reconciliation to God in Him. It is a communion of spirit, with a community of interests and resources; a common aim, and common cause; common enemies, and common friends; common aversions, and common delights.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He declared the Father; and spoke of the abiding of the Father and the Son with His loving and obedient followers.† But the teaching was too high for His disciples until the Holy Spirit fell upon them, and enlightened them in the full knowledge of Him with whom they had held so close, yet, on their part, so imperfect fellow-

* *κοινωνία*, more than fellowship; having all things in common.

† John xiv. 23.

ship. When the Spirit rested on them, they knew that they had fellowship "with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost was not only on them as a Spirit of illumination, but in them as the Spirit of adoption; so had the apostles communion with the Father as His children, and with the Son as His brethren; and were lifted up into fellowship with the most exalted relations revealed to us as subsisting in the Holy Trinity.

Now the fellowship into which the apostles were admitted is open to all believers, because "the communion of the Holy Ghost" is not for a few favoured men at the beginning of the Church, but for all the followers of Jesus. It being so, there is none of the twelve from whom we would rather hear this message: "Have fellowship with us," than from "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and who lay on His bosom at the Last Supper. If any man ever knew the high delight of Christian fellowship, surely it was John; and he it is who writes in order that all who believe may enter, if not into the same personal human intimacy, into what is more exalted still, the same spiritual communion with the Lord.

The apostolic theologian proceeds to state the moral conditions of such fellowship. They are determined by no arbitrary appointment, but by the nature and character of God, and allow of no compromise or evasion.

1. *God is light.* When He dwelt among men in the person of Christ, light shone in darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not. They who dwell in darkness cannot at any time be in unison with Him; they who walk in darkness cannot have fellowship with God.

Light is clear and open. If a man walks deceitfully, and has not the truth in him, but a lie, he offends against the perfect integrity of God, and has no fellowship with Him. Light is inviolably pure. It takes cognisance of foulness and corruption, yet receives no soil, contracts no stain; shines on what is base and noisome, keeping itself unsullied, undefiled. If a man becomes contaminated with evil, and has fellowship

with "the unfruitful works of darkness," he has no fellowship with God.

These principles are absolute, and cannot be modified under any circumstances whatever, because they rest on the essential and unchangeable nature of Him with whom we have to do. But, lest the mention of this drive any timid spirit or tender conscience to despair, St. John beautifully introduces evangelical statements of the provision made for keeping the followers of Jesus in communion with God as light.

(1.) For true-hearted disciples there is unfailling cleansing efficacy in the blood of Christ. If they do not conceal or deny their sins, but honestly confess them, they have ever renewed forgiveness, and daily cleansing from all unrighteousness.

(2.) For those who long to be quite freed from sin, and yet, alas! find that they do sin, there is "an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." The Epistle to the Hebrews describes our Lord as the High Priest, our ever-living Intercessor with God: this Epistle points to Him as our Advocate or Paraclete with the Father. The former official action is based on the character of Christ's death as a burnt-offering; and its object is to gain acceptance for believers as worshippers of God, and to obtain succour for them when they are tempted, or are made to suffer for righteousness' sake. The latter rests on the atonement as a sin-offering, and its object is to obtain from the Father the pardon of His children, when they have offended, and incurred His displeasure.

(3.) The new and heavenly birth inaugurates a life of resistance to sin (chap. ii. 29—iii. 9). Regeneration is a birth into righteousness. The children of divine grace are, by the whole tendency of their new nature, doers of righteousness; and are purified as well as gladdened in the hope of their manifestation as children of God with Christ at His coming. The divine life, or "seed of God" in them, is utterly opposed to sin; cannot will to sin any more than God Himself can so will.

The view of the Apostle on this subject is a very simple and sweeping one. He sees two families, the one of God, the other

of the devil. They who pertain to the former cannot commit sin; they who are of the latter always commit sin. Not that this describes men in their actual conduct, for at the best they have many inconsistencies and commixtures of good and evil, but it brings out in bold relief the radical opposites of good and evil disposition. The former is of God; and so far as men act out the new nature imparted by His Spirit, they do righteousness, and cannot commit sin. The latter is of the devil; and in so far as men do unrighteousness, they cut themselves off from God, and are, as our Lord said to the Jews, of their father the devil. What renders the children of God inconsistent and imperfect, is that their conduct is not the sole and suitable development of the Divine seed, the germ of holy life which is in them. There lurks in them still a seed of evil, which is not allowed to dominate, but which does succeed in marring their moral and spiritual character, and casting them into grievous practical contradictions.

2. *God is love.* He displayed His love in the mission of His only begotten Son; but as men met His manifested light with a non-comprehension, which sprang out of their love of darkness, so they met His manifested love with an unbelief which sprang from enmity to Him. Only when this enmity is removed is it possible to know and have fellowship with God in His love. "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

The love of which the Apostle speaks is much more than a genial or kindly temper of mind, a human amiability. It is a love which is "of God;" which in perfection characterises His nature, and among men is felt and exercised by those only who are born of Him. It is a divine disposition, into the possession of which we are born from above. The only begotten Son gave it expression on earth, showing the very love of God in His benevolence and patience, His words, and deeds, and sufferings. The same love ought all the children of God to manifest in their tempers and actions; and men who show it not at all, prove that they are not of God, but of that "wicked one."

The objects of love on the part of the children of God are their Father in heaven, and their brethren on earth.

We love God. This is assumed, as involved in our Christian profession (chap. iv. 20, 21). It is right, it is even natural, that, when we know God and believe His love to us, we should love Him. But He is unseen, and our love to the unseen may melt into a mere dreamy sentiment. If we would love with such love as God has shown, we must regard objects that we see, and that with patience, kindness, and self-sacrifice. The objects of such love are with us. They are our brethren. If we find them faulty, and feel it hard to love them, are not we ourselves more at fault before God, and yet He loves us? "And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also."

This obligation of love is pressed again and again in the 2d, 3d, and 4th chapters. It is the commandment of the Lord, that we love the brethren: it is the message which the Apostles had heard from the beginning; it is the proof of our having passed from death to life; it is the evidence that God dwells in us.

Such are the great requisites for fellowship with the Father and the Son. God is light; and it is a communion in the light. God is love; and it is a fellowship of love.

II. The second great thought of the epistle is Victory. Fullness of joy is to be reached only through conquest of the world as respects both its attractions and its errors.

St. John looked round upon a world openly opposed to the Gospel, and alienated from the life of God: so he wrote, "The whole world lieth in the wicked one." Human society around us at the present day may not be described in exactly the same terms as were applicable to the cities of Asia Minor at the end of the first century. It is in many respects ameliorated and refined. Nevertheless, in its tenor of thought and opinions, its pursuits, pleasures and ambitions, our modern world must be characterised as opposed to the purity and gentleness of Christ,

and averse to the whole conception of a spiritual kingdom of God.

Now Jesus Christ, in the days of His flesh, overcame the world by His union of heavenliness with humility. The prince of this world had nothing in Him, could not stir in Him any earthly craving or ambition; for the love of the Father occupied all His soul, and excluded all love of the world. The followers of Jesus are in fellowship with Him and with His Father in overcoming the world which environs them, cherishing heavenly aspirations with an humble mind, and so giving to the god of this world no room or vantage-ground. "He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not."

1. The Christian is not to yield to the world's attractions (chap. ii. 15-17). It has three lures—(1.) Lust of the flesh—the pampering of the animal appetite and propensity; (2.) Lust of the eye—roaming over objects of desire, covering a vast field of vanity and self-will; (3.) Pride of life—the ostentation and vainglory of worldlings. Such were the lures in the first temptation in the garden. "The fruit was good for food,"—lust of the flesh. It was "pleasant to the eyes,"—lust of the eyes. "And to be desired to make one wise,"—pride of life. Such again were the lures in the temptation in the wilderness. "Command that these stones be made bread,"—lust of the flesh. "Cast Thyself down" from the temple pinnacle, making a scene and sensation in the sacred courts—lust of the eye. "All the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, will I give Thee,"—pride of life.

Temptations like these the prince of this world constantly repeats. A Christian must not yield to them. He must not love the world, or the things that are therein, for such love excludes from the heart the love of the Father, and renders divine fellowship impossible. Even such happiness as the world can yield is very brief, for "the world passes away" like a pageant on the stage; while, in contrast with it, "a doer of the will of God abides for ever." Keen lovers of the world

are like so many children toiling with might and main to build forts of snow that the first warm rain will melt, or to raise towers of sand on the seashore that the next tide will sweep away.

The duty of conquering the world is charged emphatically on young men. Being naturally prone to aspiration, they should beware of wasting it on trivial or unworthy objects. If they would be men of God, they must struggle against an ignoble ambition as well as against an easy self-indulgence; and in so doing they resist not so much the world as that evil spirit which is in the world. "I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one."

2. A Christian must not listen to the spirit of error which is in and of the world. In the days when this book was written, seducing teachers propagated very unsound doctrine respecting the person of Jesus Christ, undermining the truth of His proper, genuine humanity. Those were Gnostics and Docetics, who assumed the Christian name, but were really possessed by a spirit of Antichrist; for, in overturning the apostolic doctrine concerning the Lord's person, they destroyed the whole Christian faith, denying the Father and the Son. Well might the success of such teachers fill the mind of the venerable Apostle with grave forebodings. His years drew to a close, and after him the Church would be without any of its authoritative founders, the Apostles of the Lamb. It is peculiarly important to observe what it was on which he placed reliance for the preservation of the Church from doctrinal and practical corruption. It does not occur to him to say that the Apostolic See of Rome was to be occupied in all time coming by a succession of popes, vicegerents of God on earth, and that each of these popes was to be the supreme and infallible guide of the whole Church. This is just the place where such a revelation should be made, if the thing were true; but it is as clear as possible that the thought of a continuous, infallible papacy never entered into the mind of the Apostle John. He saw nothing for it but that Christian people should bear their own

responsibility for the acceptance and maintenance of primitive truth, and the rejection of false prophets and seducing teachers wherever and whenever they arise. They are to look to the continuance in their own minds and hearts of the word "heard from the beginning,"—*i.e.*, the doctrine originally delivered by the holy apostles and prophets. They are to cherish the anointing which is received from Christ,—*i.e.*, the Spirit of truth who abides in the saints and teaches them all things. The preservative against error is the preoccupation of the mind with primitive truth vitalised and enforced by the Divine Spirit. But with this the people of Christ are to exercise caution and discretion in regard to teachers, and so "try the spirits" on some cardinal question, such as that of confessing the real humanity assumed by the Son of God. Such was the apostolic advice at a time when "many false prophets had gone out into the world." It is surely a counsel very applicable in the present hour, when false teachers form, as much as ever, the peril of the Church; when not incidental points are assailed, but central truths of Christianity are first treated vaguely, then held lightly, then disparaged, and finally denied.

Our Apostle always goes behind men to the spiritual forces, good or evil, by which they are actuated. So behind the false teachers he beholds the spirit of Antichrist in the world. This spirit, guilty of denying the coming of Christ in the flesh, was to be overcome by Christians identifying themselves with their Lord in the flesh, evincing their union with Him in His humiliation when He overcame the world, and living their life in the flesh, as St. Paul has it, "by the faith of the Son of God."

The great secret of victory is thus declared—"Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"* What is born of God overcomes the world; therefore the Holy One of God, Immanuel, overcame it. All who

* Chap. v. 4, 5. j

are born of God through the Gospel have faith in Jesus as the only begotten Son, and so enter into His victory. They are no more of the world, but of God. Their confidence is placed in Him; their treasure found in Him; and so their fellowship is real with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

It will be remembered that St. John gives it as his great object in writing the fourth Gospel, to lead men to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," so that believing they "might live through His name."* The conclusion of this Epistle is impregnated with the same purpose. It is shown that our faith in the Divine Sonship of Christ should rest on a most perfect heavenly testimony; "the witness of God which He has testified of His Son."

This witness is threefold; by the Spirit, the water, and the blood. It is an external and historical witness. It also becomes an internal and experimental evidence to believers. "He that believes on the Son of God, has the witness in himself," *i.e.*, the triple witness of the Spirit clarifying the mind, the water cleansing the heart, and the blood purging the conscience, so that there is obtained an inwrought certainty of the Divine Sonship of Jesus Christ, which no surface objection or suggested doubt can shake. We are reminded of a fine stroke of Bunyan, in his allegory of the "Holy War," when he names "Captain Experience" among the chief officers who routed and slew the army of 10,000 Doubters that came against the city of Mansoul. There is nothing so impervious to doubts as a sound personal experience of Christ's saving power and love.

Believers on the Son of God have life in Him, and should know that they have it.† Then they are to use their privilege of filial prayer through Christ, in order that their friends and brethren may have life also. Some indeed were going out of the Church, denying the Father and the Son, and so involving

* John xx. 31.

† Eternal life is manifested (chap. i. 2); promised (chap. ii. 25); given (chap. v. 11); experienced and enjoyed (chap. v. 12, 13). And Jesus Christ is that life (chap. v. 20.)

themselves in death : and the Apostle remarks, "I do not say that you should ask any question further about such a case." But for a brother who commits a more ordinary sin, or act of unrighteousness, that mars or weakens, but does not deny the life, one who is himself alive in Christ should pray to God with confidence to be heard.*

Of success in prayer, preservation from sin, and mastery over the world, this is the grand secret : Jesus is the Son of God, and we who believe are sons of God in Him. If we lose the consciousness of this sonship, the wicked one touches us. If we grieve the Spirit of adoption, the wicked one may taint and stain us. But if we feel and act as sons of God in the world, that wicked one, however much he may plot against us, touches us not, finds no *point d'appui*. We are in a life that he cannot quench ; for we are in the True One, the eternal life.

For us, in such a position and calling, to love the world, would be to commit gross idolatry. Do we not know "the true God?" How can we bow down before any shrines of world-worship? "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

* Mark the distinction between *airéw* and *éγωράω* in chap. v. 14-16.

II. JOHN.

LIKE St. Paul's Epistle to Philemon, this is a private letter rescued from the long-perished correspondence of the Apostle John. It seems to have been written about the same time as his first or general Epistle, for it breathes the same spirit, impresses the same truths, and guards against the same anti-christian errors.

May we not say that this letter, clothed with the dignity of Holy Scripture, gives a sort of apostolic sanction to private letters on religious themes? We have seen that the Apostles preached, taught, disputed, and exhorted by word of mouth; nay more, that some of them wrote down, and in so far as was possible without printing, published their views of truth and duty for the guidance and edification of Churches. All these modes of propagating and defending the faith are still employed under the sanction of their great example. But there are persons who cannot speak well, who shrink from public teaching, and still more from controversy, and who do not care to write even a short treatise for the press; who yet have quite a faculty for writing private letters; and surely it is well that they have the high sanction of St. John for that mode of disseminating and commending the truth. Some who have been well able to preach and to compose religious treatises have given much time to letter-writing, and with excellent results. Not only have their letters been useful to their own correspondents; but being published and circulated, they have reached many other hearts. It is in this way that Rutherford is known to multitudes who

never read a word of his sermons or controversial works ; and the same remark applies to such English divines as Romaine and John Newton. Many Christian scholars and busy pastors have cultivated letter-writing as a very effective way of preaching to individuals and families, reclaiming wanderers, and comforting mourners. On this principle acted Bengel, Doddridge, Wesley, Cowper, M'Cheyne, and many others. Devout women also have helped many by their letters, *e.g.*, Madame Guyon, Lady Powerscourt, and Miss Adelaide Newton. Indeed it is generally recognised as in many respects the best way in which friend can deal with friend on the topic of personal religion ; and at the present day, probably there is not a mail-bag of any size made up in the United Kingdom, which does not contain a letter, or letters, touching the salvation in Christ, and the hope of eternal life.

At the same time, this is a mode of communicating and impressing the truth that requires much discretion. It is not fair or wise to send to a friend or relation at a distance, who longs for family intelligence, a mere tissue of good advices and quotations from the Bible : and few things are more irritating to a thoughtful or a busy man, than a long letter, however well meant, in which there is no idea above the most obvious commonplace, but holy names and phrases are copiously used, with abundant interlinings and interjections thrown in to make the platitudes emphatic. If we take the Epistle before us as a sanction for edifying religious correspondence, let us not fail to observe how short it is, how terse and pointed ; how courteous and wise, yet how completely free of tiresome reflections and hackneyed sentiment.

That this is not only a private letter, but one addressed to a Christian lady, is another point of great significance. It is a tribute to the position of respect to which woman is raised by the influence of our holy religion. Apart from Christian ideas and usages, how little is woman accounted of even at this day in the lands of the Bible ; how little regard is paid to her mental and moral capacity ! An Oriental is astonished to find that of

the canonical books which form our Bible, two, viz., Ruth and Esther, actually bear the names of women. This circumstance of itself has suggested quite a new estimate of woman's position toward God and His Word. But still more significant of that position, is this second Epistle of St. John, a canonical book of Scripture, consisting of nothing else but the letter of an Apostle to a Christian lady and her children.

No one knows the lady's name. The letter was doubtless sent by a private messenger, and the writer inserted neither his correspondent's name, nor his own. It was enough to describe himself as by emphasis "the presbyter," and to address his friend as "elect lady,"* one who was manifestly chosen of God, and was for her gracious qualities beloved by all around her who "knew the truth." The matters most prominent in the Epistle, are St. John's appreciation of female piety, his joy over young Christians; and his very decided resistance to all who propagated antichristian error.

I. *Apostolic doctrine on female piety.*—Of all the twelve, who so fit to speak or write on this subject as John, who had the pious Salome for his mother; nay, more, with whom the blessed mother of the Lord had resided from the day of the crucifixion to the day of her death? During long years, in his own house at Jerusalem, he had seen the most favoured of all women, and marked in her the beauty of holiness; and no man could know better than he what should be the character and walk of women who trusted in Christ.

In this point of view, it is well worthy of notice that St. John has not a word to say, in any of his writings, of the superior holiness of perpetual virginity. Some of the Christian fathers—*e.g.*, Cyprian and Jerome—wrote ecstatic rubbish about the dignity of the state of virgins, and their nearer approximation to God. But with St. John we are in an earlier and healthier age. Among the visions which he saw in Patmos

* Some take the word "Lady" as a proper name, and style this a letter to Kyria. It is a point of little moment.

there is one of 144,000 men who followed the Lamb, and they "are virgins;" but the expression is symbolical, and denotes a virginity or chastity of soul as opposed to the defilement and harlotry of an apostacy from Christ. In the didactic writings of the Apostle there is not a word about forbiddal to marry; and, in his references to Christian womanhood, no allusion to the vows which nuns are required to take, or to the separation of sisterhoods from family and social life. The elect lady to whom this letter was sent, and her "elect sister," mentioned near to the end of it, were Christian matrons dwelling in their own houses, and nourishing their own children. No mention being made of male heads of their households, it is probable that these matrons were widows; yet they are not advised to seclude themselves from society. They were mothers of families, and they did well to honour and serve Christ in family life. No doubt this involved some family care; but it is in the midst of domestic duty, and, in some measure, through the discipline of domestic labour and anxiety, that God has been pleased to train some of the most saintly and useful women that the Church has ever seen.

Let no woman say, "Were I unmarried, or had I no family, I might do something for Christ—visit a district, attend evening meetings, take part in societies, and the like; whereas, with a husband and children constantly requiring me, I can be of no use as a Christian." It is a grievous mistake. The true state of the case is quite the contrary. A woman is of great use as a Christian, who walks with meekness of wisdom along the commonplace ways of life, loving her husband, and training her children in the Lord. It is not difficult to persuade women to attend meetings, and devote time to various kindly activities; but it is important to persuade them that Divine service begins at home, and that the patient and affectionate discharge of maternal and domestic duty is acceptable and beautiful in the sight of God.

As the teaching of this Epistle is opposed to the enforced seclusion of religious women from social and family life, so

also does it repudiate all reliance on mere raptures and ecstasies as evidences of personal religion. Woman, as well as man, is to show piety by a steady, consistent obedience to the known will of Christ. The proof of her "election of God" is in her walking in truth and love; and "this is love, that we walk after His commandments." When St. John wrote these words he was an old and experienced man. He had seen many, who once appeared full of fervent feeling and lofty aspiration, turn aside from Christ; and now the only evidence of a vital Christianity on which he relied was that of a daily and hearty compliance with the commandments of God.

II. *Apostolic joy over young Christians.*—It was in all probability at Ephesus, a busy city to which young men flocked from the country behind, that the aged John saw some of the children of this lady, and was pleased with their demeanour and conduct. In writing to her, he mentions this in words which must have filled her heart with pure motherly delight. "I rejoice greatly that I found (some) of thy children walking in truth." They were not young children, for they had left home, and had some occupation, as indicated by the expression "walking up and down," or having their course of life in conformity with truth. But their Christian walk as young men might be traced to the Christian training they had received in childhood. It was therefore a fitting subject of congratulation in such an Epistle as this. The mother could have no greater joy than to receive such testimony to the conduct of her absent children; and the Apostle had no greater joy in his old age than to see among the Christian flock the happy result and reward of parental training, example, and prayer. Amidst the anxieties for the future of the Church which brooded over him, he had this comfort, that the cause of his Lord would not lack defenders in generations following, so long as pious mothers brought up their children to know the truth, and sent them forth to walk therein.

There is a species of cross-grained old Christians who have

seldom a word of good cheer for the young, and are very ready to taunt them with inexperience and shallowness. Now, if young disciples are fussy and pretentious, let them be rebuked and better taught; but when, according to the measure of grace given to them, "they walk in truth," it is cruel and unjust that their seniors in the Church should refuse to them that genial sympathy which a youthful disposition so keenly appreciates. The fact is, that the oldest Christians, if they be right-minded men, are or should be the most concerned about the young generation, and rejoice the most when children and youth are found walking in truth—*i.e.*, cleaving to Christ, the truth, and walking up and down in His name. The oldest and most experienced shepherds devote the most watchful care to the lambs, and the wisest as well as the kindest of our old pastors, teachers, and private Christians, are they who attach most consequence to the religious training and development of children and of young men and maidens in the Lord.

III. *Apostolic warnings in regard to those who propagated antichristian error* (verses 10, 11).—The refusal of hospitality was certainly a very severe mark of disapproval; but let it be observed—(1.) That the direction is given for the protection of a private house from an infection more deadly than any disease; (2.) That the house was that of a woman, apparently a widow, who, as such, was especially exposed to the devices of those designing men whom the Apostle indicates; (3.) that the warning is not against all who hold religious error, but against the zealous propagators of false doctrine, who undermine the faith and actually mislead the souls of men.

The heresy which was spreading at the time when St. John's Epistles were written was a denial of the true manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh. At a later period men were found to deny the proper and supreme divinity of our Lord, but the first errors related to His humanity. Those who imported into Christianity old Oriental notions of the essential impurity of matter would not allow that the Son of God had really assumed

a body of flesh. But by this denial they destroyed the whole faith and comfort of the Gospel. The Apostle John never alludes to them but in terms of stern disapproval, for he well knew the doctrine of the person of Christ in two distinct natures, Divine and human, to be essential and fundamental. Whosoever denied this doctrine, on one side or the other, imperilled the Church and risked the separation of his own soul from God. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son."

The Apostle Paul had described the false teachers as creeping into houses, and leading "captive silly women" * (woman-lings). St. John knew that such was still the policy of those who spread error and fomented discord in the Church; † and therefore he charges the elect lady not to admit such false prophets within her doors, or give them any heed or countenance.

Let not the direction of the Apostle be misunderstood. It has no reference to a case of want or distress. No matter what a man's opinions may be, when he is in danger, or pain, or in trouble, he ought to receive our good offices. If our own enemy, or the enemy of our dearest convictions, hunger, we should feed him; if he thirst, we should give him drink. The warning in this Epistle relates to hospitable and familiar intercourse; and even in that view, it warrants no discourtesy to our fellowmen on the ground of their holding what we consider to be serious errors, nor does it require us to mingle exclusively with persons of our own religious persuasion. So to restrict our acquaintance, and narrow our social life, would be to pay a poor homage to truth, and to limit most unwisely our range of usefulness. What the Scripture before us really enjoins is, that we are not to regard and treat as brethren those who are actively engaged in undermining the faith. We must not bear

* 2 Tim. iii. 6.

† The heresiarchs of the early centuries were notorious for the support they sought and obtained from female disciples.

ourselves toward them so as to imply that all doctrines are to us indifferent, and that the propagation of antichristian error is merely the diffusion of a legitimate variety of opinion. So to do would be to encourage teachers who ought to be discouraged and disowned, and to involve ourselves in some complicity with the evil results that sooner or later ensue on false doctrine. Freedom of discussion is an important element of civilisation, but the Church cannot admit that a cardinal doctrine, like that of the person of our Saviour, is open to question. However popular such admissions may be among those who have exalted freedom of opinion into an idol, to our thinking they savour more of an unprincipled and restless liberalism than of that charity which rejoices in the truth.

In dealing with this subject, the Apostle John was actuated by a deep concern for the glory of Christ, the usefulness of His servants, and the destiny of His people. If those false apostles and prophets were to be welcomed in the houses of well-known Christians, then the faith of the Church was indeed shaken, and the Apostles had laboured in vain, and spent their strength for nought. "Look to yourselves, that ye do not lose those things which we have wrought, but that ye receive full reward." Not even the Apostles, much less the ordinary ministers of the word, can keep the truth in the minds of their hearers, or preserve them from ultimate loss and failure, if they will not use circumspection, but will throw themselves open to every teacher, every influence, and every book, and allow fundamental truths of the Gospel to be disparaged or denied in their houses. Convictions of truth wrought by or under evangelical teaching are thus lost; and the reward of faith and steadfastness is diminished, if not entirely forfeited.

Let the Christian people aim at a full reward for themselves and for their teachers. Let them beware of unwatchfulness and of yielding any encouragement to false doctrine, lest they spoil the work of such as are labouring for Christ in word and

doctrine, and lessen their own profit in the knowledge and grace of God. Why should they lose a "full reward"? "If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life." *

* I John ii. 24, 25.

III. JOHN.

THE third Letter of St. John resembles the second. It has the same style, same brevity, same recognition of the truth and of Christian life as a walk in truth, the same mode of beginning—the writer not naming himself, but sufficiently indicating himself as “the presbyter,”—and the same statement at the end of a preference for personal intercourse and conversation over communication by means of paper and ink. There is also that combination of tenderness with sternness which we always trace in the Apostle John. But the position of his correspondents differs. The letter to the lady recognises her in family life, and warns her against the admission of pernicious teachers into her domestic circle. The letter to the man refers more to public standing and responsibility, as “before the Church.”

The great interest of this Epistle for us lies in its disclosure of the joys and sorrows of the last of the Apostles. When St. Paul was alive and at the height of his influence, when there came upon him daily the care of all the Churches, the strain on his sensitive spirit was enormous. He was filled with joy, plunged in sorrow, tried by suspense, vexed by ingratitude, hurt by misrepresentation, hindered by prejudice, cheered by sympathy; now pleased, now pained; now exultant, now cast down; and bore upon his large and patient heart a vast responsibility. But Paul was dead, and so were all the Apostles, save John only; and he in old age was emphatically “the presbyter,” for he was patriarch of all the Churches of Asia. His position was not one of mere presidential dignity. It involved

both anxiety and toil. Those young Churches, with their inexperienced leaders, having trouble within their borders, and troubles all around, gave the aged Apostle much to think of, and frequent grounds of concern. He was no longer able to make long journeys in person, and, like all elderly people, began to feel writing irksome; but he found it necessary to interpose by messengers and letters in order to adjust the difficulties and correct the errors that disturbed the Christian community.

In some measure it is so with all public men; especially so in ecclesiastical life. One can never do much good in the Church without hard labour, or fill a position of importance without multiplying anxieties and vexations, as well as encouragements and joys.

Three men are brought before us in this Epistle: Gaius, to whom it is addressed; Diotrephes, who is blamed; and Demetrius, who is praised.

I. Gaius was a well-beloved Christian. We have no right to say that he is the same as the Gaius of Derbe, mentioned in Acts xx. 4, or the Gaius whom St. Paul baptized at Corinth, and whose hospitality that Apostle enjoyed and celebrated, for the name was a very common one.* But the remarkable hospitality of Gaius, the friend of John, gives some countenance to the theory that he was no other than Gaius the host and friend of Paul. At all events he was a man of kindred spirit.

For this good disciple the Apostle desires health and prosperity. From the reports which he had received of the conduct of Gaius toward brethren in the Lord, St. John infers that his soul was prospering, or moving in a right way, and therefore prays that in all respects it may go as well with him as it does in his spiritual life. Alas! how seldom can we put it thus! We see many a hale and prosperous man, for whom we can fervently wish that his soul prospered as much as his body and his outward estate; but we do not often see spiritual

* 1 Cor. i. 14; Rom. xvi. 23.

prosperity, as in Gaius, the most prominent and indisputable characteristic of the man.

Proofs of the soul-prosperity of Gaius are mentioned as follows:—

(1.) His adherence to the truth in Christ Jesus. The anti-christs of the period had no effect on him, for he was “of the truth,”—begotten again of the word of truth, sanctified through the truth, rooted in the truth, possessed and pervaded by the truth. Perhaps he was not competent to debate with and refute the false prophets and plausible sophists of his time; but he could hold his own ground against them, because the truth in Christ was not a mere opinion which he held at will, and might let go; it held him by the power of God; it was the life of his spirit and joy of his soul; so that it was impossible to move him from his steadfastness.

(2.) His kindness to brethren in the Lord. Certain disciples on a missionary tour had come to the town where Gaius lived. They were moved to make such a tour by the love of Christ. For His name’s sake they had gone forth, giving every proof of a disinterested spirit. The prophets, sorcerers, and thaumaturgs of the time exhibited their powers for money, and made religion quite a mercenary affair; but the Christian missionaries very properly took no gifts or contributions from the heathen to whom they preached, lest their motives should be misconstrued, and the honour of the Gospel compromised. They went on whatever resources of their own they possessed, assisted by the kindness of the groups or congregations of Christians scattered among the heathen.

We learn that when those missionary volunteers had been haughtily disowned by Diotrephes, Gaius kindly received them, although they were “strangers” to him, or personally unknown.* When they reached Ephesus, they made a mission-

* Dr. Cox makes Gaius “a layman,” and Diotrephes “a vain loud specious priest.” He says, “Strangers came to layman Gaius when turned from his pastor’s door, and in these strangers he recognised brethren.”—

ary report to the Church there, and, in doing so, mentioned this timely act of Christian love. The Apostle thereupon wrote to Gaius, to commend his conduct, and to encourage in him the disposition to welcome such brethren, and so to bear himself as a "fellow-worker for the truth."

The spread of the Gospel among the heathen, now as then, cannot be conducted by the whole Church, but it ought to engage the attention and interest of the whole Church on earth. All Christians are not required to leave their homes and go out on this errand; but those who do, whether for a shorter or a longer time, should have encouragement and aid from those who do not render personal service. If they undertake a protracted term of foreign labour, they may receive a yearly allowance with travelling expenses, as our modern custom is. In every case, those brethren who obviously devote themselves to such work under disinterested motives ought to receive hospitality, and to be forwarded on their way by the Christians resident in any place at which they arrive; so that all may have some share in so holy an enterprise, and be "fellow-workers for the truth."

Indeed this principle is applicable to Home as well as Foreign Missions. Over and above the stated provision made for worship and instruction in the Church, there is need of evangelistic preachers to bear Christ's name across even a Christian country, and through the dense populations of modern cities, preaching the Gospel to careless thousands who live without God in the world. This also, while necessarily carried out by individuals, is properly the work and should be the concern of the whole Church. They do not break down Church order, rather they perform an important Church duty, who support and encourage approved itinerant preachers in such communities as our own, relieve them from temporal cares, and "bring them on their journeys after a godly sort." In such a way a Christian who

(Rev. S. Cox on *Private Letters of St. Paul and St. John.*) This is, to say the least, gratuitous. Not laymen only have been hospitable; or priests and pastors only arbitrary and ambitious.

has no personal aptitude for missionary service may be a "fellow-worker for the truth."

It is well to observe that Gaius is thus honoured in Holy Scripture, and embalmed in blessed memory, not for any surpassing powers he possessed, any social influence, or any qualities of intellectual eminence, but for truth and love in daily life, and for a simple unpretending act of kindness. These are the things which men often neglect, thinking it necessary to show their religion in more ambitious and conspicuous ways. But there is really no better proof of personal Christianity than that which Gaius furnished in his adherence to the truth at a time when many departed from it, and his brotherly kindness to those who had no other claim on him than their service to the Lord whom he loved. Always and everywhere that man is to be highly esteemed in the Church, who combines firm convictions with a generous heart, who walks in holy truth and heaven-born charity.

II. Diotrephes was the reverse of Gaius; a man ambitious, domineering, and ungracious. It does not appear whether he held any recognised office in a congregation, or was one who pushed to the front from mere wilfulness and a desire to dictate to others. Either because he was a Jewish Christian and disliked the Gentiles, or because he had no hearty zeal for the truth, he felt no interest in missions to the heathen. If strangers came on such errands he let them alone, and would not give them any reception or recognition in the Church.

It appears further this Diotrephes had made light of the Apostle's authority. He "doth not receive us" — "prating against us with wicked words." The man was, in the worst sense of the term, an *Independent*. He would have no one interfere with the decisions of the local Church; and in that local Church he would take the lead, and dictate as to who should or should not be received. This is a kind of ecclesiastical polity which, notwithstanding all its assertions of freedom, gives peculiar facilities to a man like Diotrephes. By the

influence of his wealth and position, by the very force of his will, or by forming and leading a compact party, he contrives to dominate over a local Church or congregation. Then the quiet Christians, not wishing to quarrel with such a man, shrinking from collision with his overbearing temper, and having no recourse or appeal to a higher authority or broader tribunal, either become his helpless creatures, or break away in a mood of vexation to form another Church, fondly, but often fallaciously, hoping that into it there will come no new Diotrephes. What is the cure for such petty tyranny, but that some moral authority should be exercised over particular congregations? The Apostle John, while he lived, would not allow any local Church to be isolated in its own self-will, and controlled by the arrogance of one man. He would put down the prating words and disrespectful conduct of Diotrephes. Is there to be no remedy for such evils now, because the Apostles are dead? To us it appears evident, that in the constitution of the Church, as an organic society, provision should always exist for checking little popes, as well as for preventing one or more great ones; for guarding the just liberties of all parties and persons in Christian fellowship; and for securing a unity of action in regard to missions and all good works.

III. Demetrius was, like Gaius, a man after the Apostle's own heart. Perhaps he was the leader of the missionary band. Perhaps he was the bearer of this letter. In either case, St. John sends to Gaius a very high testimonial in his favour. Not only did all the brethren who knew him testify to his character; not only did the Apostle add the emphatic expression of his own good opinion; but the truth itself bore testimony to Demetrius. He so walked in it that it was familiar with his footsteps, and knew him well. He so reflected it in its influence on his character and life, that, while he bore witness to the truth, the truth in turn bore witness to him. This man was an Epistle of Christ known and read of all.

In this letter there is no mention of the antichristian teachers

of the period. The range of thought is within the orthodox Church, and embraces the action of brethren, the efforts of missionaries to the heathen, the assistance to be given to them, the duty of promoting the spread of the truth, and the necessity of repressing individual ambition and intolerance.

The two private letters of "the Presbyter" taken together show us the thoughts of an Apostle regarding Christian womanhood and manhood for all generations. The woman is not to be a mere household drudge, but she appears to most advantage in the domestic sphere. Her best credentials are found in her children nourished and trained in Christ from their earliest recollections, and, when they go out from her into the busy world, walking in the truth; and the beauty of her character and example is most impressively evinced in her love to the saints, and willing obedience to the commandments of God her Saviour. Then the essentials of Christian disposition are just the same in the man as in the woman; but his range is wider and more exposed to view. It is true that man also has domestic duties. A Christian man is bound to provide for his own house, and to rule his household in the fear of the Lord; but he sustains other relations to society and to the visible Church in which it is indispensable that his religious character should be approved. He is "before the Church." It is in his power, more than in that of a woman, to further or hinder the cause of the Gospel in the city or country where he dwells. It is, therefore, incumbent on him to walk openly "in the truth," to receive Christian "strangers" for their work's sake, to avoid the indulgence of a self-pleasing and domineering temper, and to do good to all as he has opportunity, "especially to them that are of the household of faith."

The model for both the woman and the man is Jesus Christ. He bore witness to the truth at every risk, and obeyed and suffered in perfect love. Let none but Christ "have the pre-eminence." Let the thought of his sublime ascendancy suppress and put to shame all petty ambitions among His disciples.

Jesus is the Perfect Man, in whom all are complete; for

“neither is the woman without the man, nor the man without the woman in the Lord.” She who would be as “the elect lady,” must look not so much to even the best of women as to Jesus. He who would be kind as Gaius or exemplary as Demetrius, must look not to saints and Apostles so much as to Jesus. He who would shun the offensive spirit of Diotrephes should look steadfastly to Jesus, and consider the self-abnegation and humility through which He passed to glory.

Further communication with Gaius St. John defers till they meet, and can “speak face to face.” Meantime he says, after the manner of his heavenly Master, “Peace to thee ;” and adds simply and naturally, “The friends salute thee ; greet the friends by name.”

JUDE.

JUDE probably is the "Judas, not Iscariot," of St. John's Gospel.* He was three-named—Judas, Lebbeus, Thaddeus, and was a brother of that James whose Epistle to the Twelve Tribes we have already considered. They were sons of Alpheus or Clopas, and Mary, and were brought up and reputed as brothers of the Lord Jesus. We cannot, however, set down the identity of Jude the writer with Jude the Apostle as a certainty, for the reference to "the apostles" in the 17th verse rather tells against it, and it is disputed by good critics.

The short book before us was probably written in Palestine, or some part of Syria, not long before the fall of Jerusalem. It is an Epistle General or Catholic, addressed to all saints; but its strain is Jewish, like the Epistle of James, and it presupposes in its readers a knowledge of Hebrew history and tradition. While it has much in common with the Epistle of James, it has even more with the second Epistle of Peter, which greatly resembles it in its vehement invective against those profligate teachers who had begun to disturb and defile the primitive Church. † During the last quarter of the first century, some of the Asiatic Churches were notoriously infested by a class of separatists and sectaries who, magnifying their knowledge, and exaggerating their liberty, led impure lives, and encouraged others to do likewise, virtually importing the heathen licentiousness into the very bosom of the Church.

* John xiv. 22.

† The letter of St. Jude seems to be the earlier of the two, and is the more impetuous.

It appears from verse 3 that St. Jude had wished to write of "the common salvation," but felt obliged to put aside that sweet and welcome theme in order to warn the saints of the evils already introduced into the Christian community, and exhort them to present a firm resistance to those corrupting influences. The fair prospects of the early Church were already shaded. The face of the new creation showed spots and blemishes.

One characteristic of the leaders of this apostasy was *wantonness*. They made the mercy of God in Christ a mere shield to cover their self-indulgence. Instead of purifying their hearts through belief of the truth, they abused the divine grace, as though it relaxed the obligation of continence, and gave some latitude to immorality. So they disgraced the Christian name by living as the heathen, and sheltering their vices under an assertion of divine favour and religious liberty. They were the forerunners of the Antinomians of later times, and of many who, without exposing themselves to that designation, have allowed themselves to continue in sin because grace abounds. It is a sort of presumptuous wickedness which has wrought much havoc in the Church all through her history, and it is by no means at an end. Rather it is to be feared that it will spread far and wide in the luxury and epicurism of the last days.

Another characteristic was *wilfulness*. The men denounced by St. Jude did not deny the name of God or of Christ, for they vaunted themselves as Christians; but they rejected the Lord's authority. St. Peter described them as "denying the Master that bought them:"* St. Jude writes that "they deny the only Master, our Lord Jesus Christ."† Therefore their religious profession was vain, because they kept not the words of Christ, but sought their own will, and followed their own devices and desires.

With their loose morals, mocking spirit, and boastful words, those men were, in St. Jude's opinion, followers of Cain, of

* 2 Peter ii. 1.

† Verse 4.

Balaam, and of Korah, rather than of Christ. As Cain, for envy, hated and slew his brother; so did they envy and destroy. As Balaam, for filthy lucre's sake, gave such counsel as led Israel into disgraceful sin; so did these men, for their own covetous ends, beguile unstable souls. As Korah rebelled against Moses, and raised dissension in the camp of Israel; so these men prated against the Apostles, and stirred disaffection in the Church. They went to the love-feasts of the Christians; but, like rocks which break the surface of a lake, they only disturbed and marred those feasts of brotherly kindness. There was no spiritual life or blessing in them. They were as "clouds without water," making a show, but really dry and empty. They were as trees, late in autumn, yielding withered fruit; nay worse, as trees whose roots are torn away from the soil, and which are therefore incapable of yielding any fruit whatever. They were as wild waves of the sea, restless, tossing up impurity, "foaming out their own shame." They were as "wandering stars," or comets that flash into view, but depart into unknown distance and darkness again.

On the punishment which awaited such men, St. Jude is terribly emphatic. He recalls to mind great judgments in the days of old; the destruction of the murmuring unbelieving Israelites in the wilderness; the reservation of fallen angels to future punishment; and the burning of "Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them" as with an eternal fire, *i.e.* a fire out of which there is no restoration, a condign and final judgment. The memory of those terrors, illustrating the holy severity of God, should admonish the saints to give no countenance whatever to the ungodly men who had "crept in" to the Christian community. "These dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and rail at dignities."

In course of this reproof and invective, St. Jude introduces two very remarkable references to Old Testament worthies—to Moses, and to Enoch.

The tradition regarding Moses is supposed to be familiar to the readers of this Book, and the allusion to it is made with a

view to expose the presumption of the false teachers in disparaging dignities. "Yet Michael, the archangel, when contending with the devil, he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee." * We should not have known this incident unless St. Jude had embodied the tradition in his Epistle; any more than we should have known the names of the Egyptian magicians who withstood Moses and Aaron, if St. Paul had not mentioned Jannes and Jambres. Michael, the archangel, appears in the Book of Daniel as a great prince with God, and the protector of the holy nation, Israel. In this capacity he was occupied with the burial of Moses, Israel's great lawgiver and leader. All that is told in Deuteronomy is, that "he (indefinite) buried him (Moses) in a valley in the land of Moab over-against Beth-peor; but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day." † One form of the tradition is, that the devil sought to prevent Michael from giving to Moses honourable burial. Another, and the one we prefer, is, that the devil opposed the resurrection of the lawgiver's body. But the point for which St. Jude makes the allusion is this—the archangel did not speak haughtily or contemptuously to that mighty spirit of evil, a celestial dignity before he fell; but said, "The Lord rebuke thee." In the same spirit is conceived Zechariah's vision of Satan accusing the High Priest of Israel before the Angel of the Lord, and defeated in his accusation by a declaration of the Lord's mercy in plucking this brand out of the fire. The same form of expression is used, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." Many thoughtless men speak of the devil in terms of jocularly and contempt. ‡ It is the cheap courage of ignorance. But the archangel, who knows the strength of Satan, § does not venture so to speak, but solemnly refers the archfiend to the judgment of God.

* Verse 9.

† Deut. xxxiv. 6.

‡ This tendency has appeared strongly in literature: witness Ben Jonson's Comedy "The devil is an ass," and Burns' "Address to the De'il."

§ Rev. xii. 7.

The tradition of Enoch's prophecy is, in some respects, even more singular than that of Moses' grave, inasmuch as there is some reason to think that St. Jude refers to an apocryphal work entitled the Book of Enoch. The book is repeatedly mentioned by early Christian writers; but was for a long time lost, till, in the year 1773, an Æthiopic copy of it was found in Abyssinia, and brought to England by the traveller Bruce. Other manuscripts have subsequently been obtained; and now the book is well known by translations into German and English. The prophecy of Enoch, cited in this Epistle, occurs near the beginning: and the prophet, more than once, describes himself as "the seventh from Adam," *i.e.* the seventh generation, Adam being counted the first. There is a significance in this according to the ancient symbolism of numbers. Enoch was the Sabbatic man who walked with God. Perhaps there is a similar significance in the fact that he lived on earth three hundred and sixty-five years, a year for each day of the solar year, and then did not die, but "was not, for God took him" to pursue his years elsewhere.

For the Book of Enoch, as a whole, no authority can be derived from the citation of a single passage. It is the production of an unknown writer, and is certainly not older than the first century B.C. At no time has it been reckoned among Canonical Books. All that needs be maintained regarding it is, that it contains at least one authentic and genuine utterance of the venerable Enoch, traditionally transmitted from the earliest times. Noah may easily have heard it from his grandfather Methuselah, the son of Enoch. It prepared him for the judgment of God by water in his own lifetime. And he may have delivered the oracle to his descendants, to prepare the post-diluvian world for another and a still greater judgment. In its ultimate fulfilment pointed to in the Epistle, the oracle announces the coming of the Lord with holy myriads for the judgment of the Great Day, and the descent of flaming fire on those who have corrupted Christendom itself, and filled the earth again with wilfulness, wantonness, and injustice. "As

the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be."

There need be no surprise that an Apostle should quote anything from an apocryphal book. Apocryphal means uncanonical, but not fictitious or worthless. Why should not a passage, itself known to be genuine, be quoted from the Book of Enoch, as well as a tradition about the body of Moses inserted without any written authority or reference whatever, or quotations made in the Old Testament from "the Book of the Wars of Jehovah," and from "the Book of Jasher;" or references given to the Books of Nathan the Prophet, Gad the Seer, Iddo the Seer, and the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite? None of these works were ever received as canonical scripture.

Much of the Epistle of St. Jude is thus occupied with the wicked men who abused, under pretext of using, liberty in Christ. Their conduct is exposed, and their doom pronounced without flinching. But the Apostle addresses the saints on their own line of duty, and affectionately urges them to "contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered" to them, and not to allow it to be tampered with. He will also have them keep themselves pure from the contamination which was being brought "unawares" into the Church.

Five times in course of the Epistle a word occurs which is variously rendered in the Authorised Version, keep, reserve, preserve. The "beloved of God the Father" are regarded as "preserved by Jesus Christ." In contrast to them are pointed out those angels who are "kept in everlasting chains," and sinful men "for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever."* The Christians are then admonished to keep themselves in the love of God, *i.e.*, in the possession and enjoyment of divine love as the true element and elixir of a spiritual life. And how? (1.) By building themselves up on their most holy faith. So the faith was to be contended for, not with a view to barren controversial victory, but because Christian character must be built thereon. It was delivered to the saints in order

* Verses 1, 6, 13.

that they might continue in it, and not be moved away from the hope of the Gospel. (2.) By praying in the Holy Ghost ; for the Divine Spirit (which the false teachers had not, ver. 19) helps infirmities, corrects errors, subdues pride, cures lethargy, kindles fervour, and teaches believers how to pray, and what to pray for as they ought. Between the ascension of their Master and the day of Pentecost, the disciples, and Jude among them, prayed much *for* the Spirit. After the day of Pentecost it became their privilege, and continues to be ours, to pray *in* the fellowship of the Spirit, through the mediation of the Son, to the Father of mercies and God of all consolation ; the Spirit within us making intercession with unutterable pantings of hope, deep sighs of the heart for the manifestation of the glory of the sons of God.

St. Jude does not forget to express this hope. While he shows us ungodly men and seducers with their "fearful looking for of judgment," he exhorts those who keep themselves in the love of God to "look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever."

There follows an admonition to deal discreetly and kindly with those unwary persons who were being beguiled ; and the Epistle ends with doxology. The men who were working so much mischief in the Church followed their own impulses, "walked after their own ungodly lusts." On the contrary, the men who escaped the contamination were kept not by their own will or wisdom, but by the grace of God. They did indeed keep themselves ; but the ultimate secret of their success was that God kept them. The word employed is stronger than that on which we have remarked above. It means, to guard and protect from all adversaries. Glory then is ascribed to the only wise God our Saviour, who, in a time of delusion and apostasy, is able to keep His people, not infallible, but unfallen. There is no excuse for sin. There is no necessity any more to serve it, or to live as debtors to the flesh. There is no permission to fall and rise at pleasure. The object of the Divine Saviour is to

keep His own from falling. And well it is for them that He should so keep them, even though it may require reproofs and chastisements. These will never come without cause from "the only wise God." Happy is he who, with simplicity of heart, casts his foolishness at the feet of the Saviour's wisdom, and put his weakness into the hand of the Saviour's strength, saying,

"Hold it fast,
Suffer me not to lose my way,
And bring me home at last."

He is able to do this. As Rutherford says: "Our Lord and Chief Shepherd will not want one weak sheep or dying lamb that He hath redeemed. He will tell His flock, and gather them all together, and make a faithful account of them to His Father, who gave them all to Him." Says the Apostle: He will "present (or set) them faultless before the presence of His glory in exceeding joy." What a contrast to the blackness of darkness this "exceeding joy"! Joy to the saved when they see their Saviour as He is, and joy to the Saviour when all that are His are gathered together unto Him. "To the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and power, before all time, and now, and to all the ages! Amen."

REVELATION.

No. I.

GENERAL FEATURES AND CLAIMS OF THE BOOK.

THE title of this extraordinary book is "Apocalypse of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him, to show to His servants what things must come to pass shortly." Thus it is an unveiling of our ascended Lord, for the instruction and comfort of the Church which, not seeing Him, loves Him and waits for Him. God gave it to Him, and He by His angel signified it to His servant John. This mode of expression is maintained throughout the book. In other writings of John we read of the Father and the Son, but in this always of God and Christ, or God and the Lamb.

It is possible to lay too much stress on the word "shortly" in the title. Some writers have inferred from this that the things disclosed as future were or are to occur in quick succession; others, that the entire prophecy of the book must refer to the immediate future. But it is not safe to found so much on a word of this description, or on the phrase (chap. i. 3. xxii. 10) "the time is near." The apparent distance of objects depends on the power of the eye, the intensity of the light, and the condition of the atmosphere. The same principle regulates the seeming distance of events disclosed in prophecy. Dangers distant in respect of actual time may appear to a seer immediately impending; and happy changes, though remote, are by vivid hope brought near. Hence an alertness of language in regard to both the perils and the prospects of the Church, and

especially that great event which is the supreme object of New Testament prophecy—the second appearing of Jesus Christ.

The writer of the book is Christ's servant John. He takes no title of ecclesiastical rank or official dignity—"John to the Seven Churches of Asia;" and this simplicity surely favours the belief that he is no other than the Apostle John, one of the sons of Zebedee. Any other of the name, such as John Mark, or the alleged Presbyter John of the second century, would have described himself more fully.* The beloved disciple, in his old age the sole survivor of the twelve, was too well known in the province of Asia, and altogether too eminent in position, to require, when addressing the Churches in and near Ephesus, more than the simple announcement of his name.

The place in which the revelation was given to John was the small island of Patmos, one of the group called the Sporades, lying about 24 miles off the coast of Asia Minor.† The Apostle was there "for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus," and the tradition is that he had been banished thither by order of the Emperor. Whither this occurred under Nero, A.D. 57-68,

* Bleek (*Lectures on the Apocalypse*) has put the argument for this later John as plausibly as possible, but there is no basis for it excepting some rather vague words of Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.*, lib. iii. 39), reporting a statement of Papias, who was not a model of exactness. The evidence in favour of the Apostle John as the writer is both internal and traditional, and can never be shaken. The most recent Rationalistic critics indeed concede this, with the view of proving that since this work is by St. John, the fourth Gospel cannot be his. But Dr. William Lee (in *Speaker's Comment.*), and Dr. Milligan have successfully shown the harmony of the two books, both in doctrine and in structure.

† The modern name of the rocky isle is Patino. It is twenty-eight miles in circumference. "Patmos has been in one respect singularly favoured. The Turks have never visited it; none dwell on the island, and the moderate tribute which they exact has been punctually paid, and sent by the islanders themselves to Smyrna. No mosque has ever been erected on the spot rendered sacred by the vision of the Apocalypse. Slavery has been unknown; piracy has never been practised."—*Imper. Bible Dict.*, *Art. Patmos.*

On the influence of the locality and its surroundings on the sacred visions, see Dean Stanley's *Sermons in the East*, p. 230.

or under Domitian, A.D. 81-96 is a much disputed question. There is a great preponderance of ancient authority in favour of the later date; yet many modern critics, on alleged internal grounds, maintain the earlier. They are influenced by exegetical considerations. For example, they find the enigmatic "Number of the Beast" in the words *Neron Cæsar* in Hebrew characters. But it is strange, to say the least, that Irenæus, living in the second century, had never heard of this solution, and refers the Book to the reign of Domitian.

Renan dates it very precisely in the reign of Galba, A.D. 68, and is followed in this by our more recent Anglican interpreters, *e.g.* Plumptre, Lumby, and Farrar. The visions are supposed to indicate events of that troubled period, and the approaching downfall of Jerusalem. It is held without scruple that the seer fell into some serious mistakes. He shared a popular delusion, that Nero was not really dead, and would shortly reappear! He expected that the Roman army would subdue Jerusalem for three years and a half, but would not take the Temple! He also looked for a successful insurrection of the Provinces against the Imperial City (chap. xvii. 16-17), whereas, after Nero's death, the power of Rome was more firmly established than ever! How could a book, containing such egregious mistakes, and openly falsified by events within a year or two after it was written, ever have gained repute or authority in the Church?

Canon Medd not only holds the Apocalypse to have been written before the fall of Jerusalem, but regards Jerusalem, not Rome, as the Babylon of the book. The "kings of the land" are the tetrarchs. The object of the whole is to announce Christ's coming in judgment to destroy the old Jerusalem and bring in the new. The millennium is "the now current dispensation."*

Such theories of interpretation change the book from a prophecy into a not very difficult forecast of events close at hand. We cannot accept this. The Apocalypse seems to us to

* Bampton Lectures for 1882. Note 11.

have a wider and longer range ; and we see no sufficient reason to doubt the statement of ancient authors and the settled opinion of Christendom, which dates the work nearly thirty years after the catastrophe of Jerusalem.

The book being entitled the Unveiling of Jesus Christ, opens with this announcement of His appearing—"Behold He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him ; and whosoever they were that pierced Him ; and all tribes of the earth shall wail because of Him." We seem to hear again the words of our Lord in that great prophecy which He pronounced while He sat on the Mount of Olives a day or two before His death—a prophecy which underlies much of the phraseology of this book : "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven ; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."*

To this grand event all the Revelation steadily tends ; but it takes a wide scope as it proceeds. John is commanded to write, (1.) the things which he had seen, *i.e.* the vision given to him of the Son of man ; (2.) the things which are, *i.e.* wonders in heaven ; and, (3.) the things which shall come to pass hereafter, *i.e.* future judgments, defeats, and victories.

I. *The manner of the Book.* This is singularly fitted to its high theme. The Revelation is quite removed from ordinary prose composition, and ought to be regarded as a grand Christian poem, requiring for its interpretation some measure of idealistic power. John is the *Vates* of the New Testament Scripture, at once the prophet and the poet.

But the book is not poetical only ; it is symbolical throughout, and in this respect is congruous with the mental characteristics of the Apostle John, who, as his Gospel indicates, delighted in figurative and symbolic teaching. Most copious and varied are the Apocalyptic symbols ; and they must be carefully studied, and consistently and soberly interpreted. If a symbol be taken

* Matt. xxiv. 30.

to mean one thing here, and another there, the book is made the sport of random, haphazard, capricious conjectures.

(1.) There are symbols in *numbers*, *e.g.* :—

4, the number of the earth, or mundane space ;— 4 quarters, 4 winds, 4 living creatures, &c.

7, the number of completion and of rest. Its half, $3\frac{1}{2}$, is the sign of broken and limited operation ; but when a Divine cycle of creative work or providential government is indicated it is marked by 7. The sign of protracted labour, never reaching rest, is 666, the number of the wild beast.

10, the number of the world's activity and development. Therefore, both in the Book of Daniel, and here, a world-power has 10 horns.

12, the number of Church order and plenitude, as formerly it had been the signature of All-Israel ; 12 stars, 12 gates, 12 foundations, 12 apostles, 12 fruit harvests from the tree of life.

From 10 and 12 are formed greater numbers, 1000, 144, and 144,000.

(2.) There are symbols in *colours*, *e.g.* :—

White, denoting purity (white garments), righteousness (a white throne), joy (a white cloud), victory (a white horse).

Red, for bloodshed and war.

Purple, for imperial luxury and pomp.

Emerald green, for patient, winning grace.

Black, for calamity and distress.

(3.) There are symbols in *animated forms* :—

The Zoa, composite figures, expressive of the whole life in creation, and the redemption of the whole creation to God.

The lamb, a symbol of Jesus Christ, as He once suffered, and is now enthroned.

The eagle, indicating swift movements in the region of thought and opinion.

Horses, representing movements on the earth.

A wild beast, a cruel trampling power.

Frogs, unclean spirits.

Locusts, all things that waste and torment.

- (4.) There are symbols in the *elements and forces of nature* :—
 The air = the sphere of life, and of intellectual and spiritual influence.
 The earth = the place of nations.
 An earthquake = sudden shaking of nations.
 The sea = human society tossed and troubled.
 A cloud = the chariot of Divine manifestation.
 A storm of lightning and hail = a great crisis or judgment.

These may suffice as examples of apocalyptic symbols. But they are only specimens of what might form a much longer list.

In its symbolism, and in the whole tenor of its prophecy, this book rests on visions of an earlier date, especially those imparted to Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. It is vain to attempt an interpretation of it without considerable familiarity with the Old Testament, for, though written in Greek, the Book is entirely Hebrew in its images and allusions. There is also a very marked connection, as we have hinted, with that prophecy of the Master which He poured into the ears of His disciples on the Mount of Olives. In particular, there is the same scenic or panoramic combination of events remote from each other, but having the same character and intention. Two, if not more, horizons of judgment are in view at once, the nearer a foreshadow of the more distant.

Yet another characteristic is to be noticed, while we speak of the manner of this Book. It is no "fine phrensy," but a

wonderful work of divine art, curiously wrought and most delicately balanced. This is carried out into the most minute detail, while it is shown on a large scale in the parallelism of the great cyclical visions. Only the most careless reader can suppose the Book to be tangled and confused. It is a masterpiece of construction, fitted and bound together by wisdom from above.

II. *The contents of the book* are far too rich and copious to have any adequate treatment in such lectures as this. But the following general features of the Revelation may be noted:—

1. It is a book of the connection of things in earth with things in heaven. In the sense it gives us of this connection lies the secret of the awe we felt when we read or heard it read in our childhood—an awe which grows upon us in advancing years, and is not gloomy, but good and healthful, calming our spirits with the assurance that heaven lies about us, and heaven is open, and the angels of God are near.

The reader is not left on the earth to peer into a distant heaven, but borne into heaven, and thence made to see, as through masses of cloud and rolling mists, the things that come upon the earth. There are announcements and scenes in heaven prior to changes and movements on earth. There are voices from the throne, notes of golden harps, sounding trumpets, cries of disembodied souls, and choruses of song that peal through the universe. Strong angels pass to and fro, making epochs in human history, and changing the affairs of the Church and of nations. What we call the course of events is compassed by spiritual agency unseen. Earth touches heaven. Alas! it also touches hell.

2. It is a book of strong moral contrasts. Good and evil, in and around the earth, are brought out in sharp distinction and stern alternative. There is no compromise, no shading or blending of moral opposites, or attempt at concord between Christ and Belial. A deep decided line is drawn between the righteous and the unjust, the holy and the filthy, the Lamb and the wild beast, the throne of God and the abyss, Michael with his

angels and the dragon with his angels, the Bride and the harlot, New Jerusalem and great Babylon.

3. It is a book of very definite teaching on redemption by blood. This, which is expressed or implied in all the Scriptures, has in the Revelation a marked and solemn emphasis. Those who are now protesting against what they call a "blood theology" may do some good in exposing coarse materialistic expressions; but let them beware lest they even seem to condemn this holy Apocalypse, which, in the midst of its most heavenly scenes, celebrates the atoning blood. Saints sing, and angels speak of redemption by the blood, cleansing in the blood, and victory by the blood of the Lamb.

4. It is a book of protracted conflict. For this we are prepared by the last-written Epistles, 2 Timothy, 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude, which give warning of fiery trials at hand, and of ominous departures from the faith. Some men turned aside after Satan, others gave way to indifference and selfishness, contentions were rife, and antichrists many. Prophetic intimations made the prospect darker still, for the Spirit spoke expressly of perilous times in the last days, marked by extreme moral perversity and the appearance of "scoffers walking after their own lusts." Indeed, in reading the later Epistles, we seem to feel the air charged with elements of confusion and tempest, and to see dark clouds hanging on the distant hills. We look for a stormy sequel, and we find it in this Revelation of troublous times, of the patience of Christ in His members, of tribulation and martyrdom, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, and war even in heavenly places.

In this respect also, it is a book for present-day reading. Christians need to be trained in patience, and braced for conflict. Because they have peace with God, they should expect assaults of the devil, danger in the Church, and tribulation in the world. It is well also that triflers and trimmers should know that ease in Zion is not safe for the children of Zion, and that they should hear a deep voice sounding from this book, "Art thou for God or for Baal? Wilt thou follow the

world, seeking its smiles, and 'wondering after' its greatness, or follow the Lamb in the faith and patience of saints?"

5. It is a book of judgment brought forth to victory. The Lamb is the leader and commander of the faithful; and He makes war, and conquers. From the wrath of the Lamb kings and mighty men flee. The prince of the world is punished. Nations are judged. On the earth, the sea, the rivers and fountains of waters, the sun, the throne of the Beast, the great river Euphrates, is poured out the wrath of God. The "harlot," sitting on many waters, is judged, and the blood of God's servants avenged. At last the whole confederacy of evil is hurled down in one stern crash of ruin, and plunged into "the lake of fire." The doctrine of penal retribution is deeply engraved on the Book: and the God whom it honours is a God of judgment. With solemnly repeated emphasis it points the militant Church to the epoch of deliverance and triumph at the appearing of Jesus Christ, and makes the assurance of this stronger and brighter as days of rebuke and blasphemy draw on.

A Book with such characteristics fitly concludes the Holy Bible. Full of allusions to ancient visions, prophecies, and songs, it brings the whole continuity of Scripture to a sublime and worthy close. At last the patience of patriarchs and saints is rewarded; the longings of Israel and of the Church are fulfilled; and the glory of God shines unhindered on a scene of righteousness and peace.

In the end of the Book appears that Holy City for which Father Abraham and all the children of faith have devoutly looked. This is society pure, stable, and well-governed. "Take from the Bible the final vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, and what will have been lost? Not merely a single passage, a sublime description, an important revelation, but a conclusion by which all that went before is interpreted and justified. We should have an unfinished plan, in which human capacities have not found their full realisation, or Divine preparations their adequate result. To the mind that looks

beyond individual life, or that understands what is needful to the perfection of individual life, a Bible that did not end by building for us a city of God, would appear to leave much in man unprovided for, and much in itself unaccounted for. But, as it is, neither of these deficiencies arises. Revelation decrees not only the individual happiness, but the corporate perfection of man; and closes the book of its prophecy by assuring the children of the living God that He hath prepared for them a city."*

Paradise, too, is restored; not, however, a solitary place, where one might hide among the trees or sleep in the wood, but a garden of pleasure in the very city of the saints, watered by the pure river that flows from the throne, and beautified with fruitful trees of life in the broad street of the city, and on either side of the river.

Surely a book like this ought not to be treated with neglect, or remain unstudied in a kind of indolent despair. It is true that Luther, intent on dogma, was impatient of these visions; and men like Schleiermacher, not to speak of more sceptical critics, here and abroad, have treated the Apocalypse with scant respect; but, on the other hand, it is a book which grows in the estimation of devout Christians, and promises to become of more and more service to the Church amidst the increasing confusions and perplexities of Christendom. A prejudice has been raised against it in sober minds by a class of confident soothsaying interpreters, who explain the Revelation as though it were a prospective narrative of the annals of Western and Central Europe, by help of Gibbon's "History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," Rollin's "Universal History," Sismondi, Alison, and the *Times* newspaper. But it ought always to be remembered that the book itself is a Divine production, and in no degree responsible for what may have been spoken or written about it by men of infirm and excited judgment.

A notion prevails that the Apocalypse suits dreamy students

* Canon Bernard's Bampton Lectures, p. 287.

and unpractical devotees, but can be of little use to men who are occupied with the hard prosaic tasks of life. We hold the contrary opinion. It is the dreamy or fanciful mind that needs such reading least ; the toilworn and careworn man who needs it most : as a relief from what is depressing to spiritual life and hope, a stimulus to the nobler aspirations, and a reminder that around, above, and beneath all the affairs and fortunes of mankind, moves on the mystery of God. How welcome too should be this Book to the tried and sorrowful, who are made to see their brethren in tribulation clad in white robes, having "garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness," and to hear glorious voices sounding from the habitation of God's throne on high !

It cannot be denied that there are formidable difficulties in the interpretation ; but even when the mind is baffled as to exact meanings, and the understanding appears to be unfruitful, the heart is refreshed as by a heavenly aroma, transcendent truths sink into the mind in a manner we cannot explain, and holy suggestions and comforts interpenetrate our spirits with delight.

REVELATION.

No. II.

THE SEPTENARY CYCLES.

IF we read this Book cursorily, we are apt to think that it is full of poetic license and allegorical exaggeration ; and that one should be satisfied to gather from it general lessons and impressions, without any attempt at exactness in detail. But a closer examination shows that the Revelation is as far as possible from being a rhapsody. As we have said in our last lecture, it is a Book most carefully constructed, curiously wrought, nicely arranged, and skilfully balanced. Just as ancient Hebrew prophecy in its most impassioned utterances obeyed the rhythm, and even observed alphabetic and acrostic rules of Hebrew poetry, so this prophecy of the New Testament has a perfect internal order, and, if one may use such an expression, artistic symmetry.

Prominent in the Book are certain septenary series. One of these—that of the seven thunders—is not declared, but “sealed up,” and, therefore, not to be interpreted.* But the four great series are declared—viz., the seven Churches addressed ; seven seals broken ; seven trumpets blown ; seven bowls poured out.

A preliminary question must be considered before we look into these series in detail. It relates to the principle on which each series is constructed, and on which the various series are connected together. The prevailing school of comment on this Book—at least since the Reformation—has been that of con-

* Chap. x. 1-4.

tinuous history, finding in these visions the course of events in Christendom partly fulfilled and partly unfulfilled. Some of the interpreters are preterists, and allege that all is accomplished; others are futurists, even extreme futurists, assigning the whole Book of Revelation to the Jews after the first resurrection. But the mode of historical interpretation, carried out with so much patient learning by the late Mr. Elliot,* has had the most general support, and forces on us the inquiry, Does each series, taken by itself, indicate a course of consecutive events? And do the various series follow each other in a direct line of time, so as to form, in anticipation, a continuous history of the Church? Our answer must be in the negative; and for the following reasons:—

1. The number seven is certainly symbolical of a divine completeness; and it is against all the principles of symbolism to explain a septenary series as meaning seven actual events, no more and no fewer. Of course this objection applies quite as strongly to the reckoning of several series numerically on chronological tables, as indicating fourteen, twenty-one, or twenty-eight successive dates in Church history.

2. The annals of Christendom refuse to arrange themselves in harmony with such a theory of the Apocalypse. It has been attempted to assign the seven seals to Rome Pagan, the seven trumpets to Rome Christian, and the seven bowls of wrath to Rome Antichristian. It has been held that the seals denote the overthrow of heathenism, and the success of the Emperor Constantine; that the trumpets announce the irruption of the northern barbarians, and the defeat of the Moslem power; and that the bowls of wrath began to be poured out at the French Revolution in the end of the last century, and are being poured out still. But it is a vain and desperate attempt to lay these prophetic series alongside of the actual annals of Europe. The effort to arrange such history in three or four grand divisions, and subdivide into twenty-one or twenty-eight successive epochs, has led, on the one hand, to such puerile handling of

* "*Horæ Apocalypticae.*"

Scripture, and, on the other, to such capricious and arbitrary emphasising of particular events and dates, as is positively repulsive to a sober and reverent mind. Better the most vague and hazy conception of the contents of this Book, if accompanied by some recognition of its poetic grandeur, than a prosaic interpretation brought about by fixing, in the most arbitrary way, on particular passages of European history, slighting other events perhaps quite as important as those which are selected, and passing over centuries in silence.

(3.) There is a parallelism between some of the series in question, that points to a conclusion quite at variance with the theory of historic continuity. This is particularly obvious in the case of the series of trumpets as compared with that of vials or bowls. They go over the same course of events, and are synchronous, not successive. The latter reiterates the lessons and warnings of the former, according to that fashion of doubling or repeating the sense which belongs to Hebrew poetry, proverb, prophecy, and dream. Who can read Old Testament prophecy and psalm without being struck by the use made of refrain and iteration? And why should we not see in the duplicate dreams of Joseph and of Pharaoh,* and in the virtual repetition of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of successive empires in a dream of Daniel,† a hint of the manner in which the visions of John are connected together and ought to be interpreted?

In fact the prophetic movement is not in straight lines from one date to another, but in mighty cycles or wheels, more or less coincident; and one may say of them in the words of Ezekiel, "As for the rings, they were so high that they were dreadful." But it is not meant that one cycle is a mere repetition of another. There is eschatological progress. There is an indication of growing intensity of good and evil. The tragic element especially becomes more prominent: and with increasing severity, each series or cycle of judgment moves the world further on towards the last judgment in the great day of God.

* Gen. xxxvii. 5-11, xii. 1-8.

† Dan. ii. 31-45, vii.

Now, let us look into the series with as much minuteness as the plan of our lectures will permit. In every case there is a vision of glory preceding and introducing a cycle of fluctuation, distress, desolation, and judgment. A vision of Christ, or a pre-celebration of His triumph, is the invariable forerunner of an earthly crisis and a scene of conflict.

I. Seven Churches addressed.

1. This series opens with a vision of the Son of Man in great majesty, as the living Inspector of the Churches.* He appears to John in the long robe of priestly and kingly dignity. His eyes glow and pierce as a flame of fire, for nothing can elude His sight. He has something of terror in His aspect, for He is about to speak terrible things in righteousness, and to smite with the "sharp two-edged sword of His mouth." In His hand are seven stars; and at His feet seven candlesticks—signs of the Churches with which He is about to deal.

2. Then comes seven messages to seven Churches of Asia.†

They are addressed to the angels of those Churches; for no man (but John himself) is spoken to in the Apocalypse. The Book is occupied with ideals and symbols; so each Church is represented by its angel, just as in the visions of Daniel there are angels of the nations—of Greece, Persia, and Israel.‡ Whatever of praise or blame is meant for the Church is sent, not as in the plain apostolic way to the saints with their bishops and deacons, but in apocalyptic fashion to the angel who takes charge of that Church under Christ.

Seven Churches are selected in the province of Asia, where the Apostle John, in his later years, wielded a patriarchal influence. These were not all the Churches in the province, but seven are taken to represent the whole visible Church; and such seven, as in their diversities of faithfulness and unfaithfulness, zeal and lethargy, give opportunity for the most various counsels, reproofs, and promises with a view to the profit of the Church in all time coming.

* Chap. i. 9-20.

† Chaps. ii. iii.

‡ Dan. x. xii.

Then this complete cycle of Churches is prophetic. We do not mean this in the sense vehemently urged by some writers, that they cover and predict seven actual successive stages of Church history. Such a theory contradicts the symbolical meaning of a septenary cycle, and is burdened by the awkward fact, that its keenest supporters cannot agree on the details of the historical application which they suggest. But the Epistles or messages to those Churches, do certainly illustrate conditions of the Church at large, and of particular Churches, which return again and again; tendencies to decay of love, relaxation of discipline, and formality of spirit; controversies, labours, and the keeping of "the word of patience." Alas! there will be lukewarmness in many hearts when the Lord is at hand, when the Judge is standing at the door. It is, however, no more than a prophetic glance that we find in the first series. The element of prediction becomes much more prominent in the cycles that follow.

The seven messages are constructed exactly on the same plan. The Lord announces Himself under a title or titles appropriate to the nature of the message which follows, or the condition of the particular Church. Then the formula—"I know thy works." The body of the message or the Epistle comes next; and the conclusion consists in each case of a promise to every one who should overcome the evil which invaded that particular Church, and of a summons to "him who has an ear," to "hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches."

The Church in Ephesus is commended for good discipline, but admonished in regard to a decay of Christian affection, and called to repent. The Church in Smyrna is warned of coming tribulation. Pergamos and Thyatira are charged to give no place to the libertine sectaries that molested them. Sardis is reprovèd for formalism; and Philadelphia praised for fidelity. The Church in Laodicea is rebuked for self-confidence and lukewarmness, and charged to buy the best blessings of the Lord.

So ends the first and simplest series.

II. Seven seals broken.

1. This series, too, is introduced by a glorious vision.* The Divine throne is seen in heaven, surrounded by twenty-four thrones for the presbyters who represent the redeemed Church, and by four composite cherubic figures, instinct with life, symbols of the vital powers of creation in harmony with redemption. These all praise the Lord; but the creation, symbolised by the Zoa, only [speaks of the Lord, while the Church represented by the presbyters, speaks to Him, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power."

In the right hand of God is seen a sealed roll: and Jesus Christ, appearing as a lamb which had been slain, takes the roll amidst loud acclamations of praise, and proceeds to open its seven seals. Thus while the preliminary vision to the first series represents Christ as the inspector of the Churches, this reveals Him as the powerful ruler in the midst of the throne, who "has prevailed to open the roll, and to loose the seven seals thereof." †

2. The roll of Divine purpose, as unfolded in seven portions, seal by seal, producing the following results: ‡—

(1.) A figure of conquest on a white horse, white being the colour of triumph.

(2.) A figure of civil war on a red horse, taking away peace from the earth.

(3.) A figure of dearth or scarcity on a black horse, black being a sign of mourning.

(4.) A figure of devastation; death riding on a livid horse,

* Chap. iv. 5.

† Mr. C. E. Fraser Tytler, in a work little known, "*The Apocalyptic Roll*," has arranged what follows as on the two sides of an Eastern roll or deed of inheritance, and illustrated the effect of the gradual unrolling of the document, as seal after seal is broken. He claims that "no sooner are the seemingly complicated and entangled visions of the unveiling placed on such a roll than they at once assume coherency, and harmony takes the place of seeming confusion."

‡ Chap. vi.-viii. 1.

with Hades like a hearse, or moving, yawning grave, following after. This devastation proceeds under the four forms mentioned by the old prophets,—war, famine, pestilence, and the ravages of wild beasts. (Compare chap. vi. 8 with Ezek. xiv. 21.)

These four judgments being directed against life on the earth, are successively announced by the four Zoa. Evidently they coincide with the “beginning of sorrows” foretold by our Saviour in His great prophecy or eschatological discourse, delivered on the Mount of Olives three days before His death. (See Matt. xxiv. 6–8.)

(5.) The martyrs are to be avenged, but not yet. The Lord had said in the discourse to which we have just referred,—“Then shall they deliver you up to the afflicted, and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated of all nations for My name’s sake.”* When the fifth seal was broken, John saw the souls of the martyrs, like the life-blood of ancient sacrifices, poured out at the bottom of the altar. They cried, as once the blood of Abel cried to God from the ground; and they were clothed with favour, and bidden to rest awhile till the cup of persecution was full.

(6.) Universal panic. A great earthquake denotes the convulsion of society. Portents in the sky announce revolution and disaster.† It is supposed by the terrified dwellers on earth to be the great day of the wrath of the Lamb, that *Dies iræ* of which the Latin Church sang with a cowering spirit in times when superstition had dimmed the faith and hope of the Gospel.

Preces meae non sunt dignae,
Sed Tu bonus fac benigne,
Ne perenni cremer igne!

Confutatis maledictis,
Flammis acribus addictis,
Voca me cum benedictis.

* Matt. xxiv. 9.

† Such signs of distress and fear are found in Isaiah, Hosea, and Joel, but the chief passage for comparison is Matt. xxiv. 29, 30.

Oro supplex et acclinis,
 Cor contritum quasi cinis :
 Gere curam mei finis.

Before the seventh seal is broken, and as we seem to draw near "the crack of doom," there is introduced a vision of the sealing or preserving of God's servants in the Tribes of Israel.* Nor are the chosen men of Israel the only blessed ones. A countless multitude appears of all nations, kindreds, peoples, and tongues. These redeemed ones have come out of "the great tribulation" which had scourged the earth; and they keep a "feast of tabernacles" before the throne and before the Lamb. Then at last,—

(7.) Not crash or tumult at the breaking of the seventh seal, but "silence in heaven;" a sign that all the occupants of heaven acquiesce in the judgment past, and await the judgments still to be unveiled.

Thus another cycle is accomplished; but the mighty wheel does not stop. It begins a new revolution.

III. Seven trumpets blown.

1. The introduction to this series is a rite of high solemnity in the presence of God.† There is a presentation of the prayers of saints with incense; and, as a sign of the answering of those prayers "by terrible things," there is a casting down of altar-fire upon the earth. The same golden censer that wafted up the incense, receives and pours down the fire. Thus the way is prepared for a series of devouring judgments.

2. Seven angels "prepared themselves to sound" the trumpets which were given to them, as seven priests blew their horns before the fall of Jericho. The results which ensue are arranged in several respects like those which follow the breaking of seals. Thus, in either case, there is a dif-

* Chap. vii. Here also the foundation is laid on our Lord's discourse. See Matt. xxiv. 31.

† Chap. viii. 2-6. Comp. Ezek. x. 1-7, following the marking of God's servants in Ezek. ix.

ference marked between the first four and the remaining three. There is an interval between the sixth and seventh, occupied by two episodic visions. The greatest intensity of terror is under the sixth; and then, as under the seventh seal there was silence in heaven, so, under the seventh trumpet, the mystery of God is finished.

The effects produced, as the trumpets are successively blown, may be summarily stated thus: *—

- (1.) Havoc on earth.
- (2.) Convulsion; part of the sea turned into blood.
- (3.) Bitterness.
- (4.) Darkness.

All these woes fall upon "a third part" of the earth, the sea, the rivers and fountains, and the heavenly orbs. There is a marked reserve. The judgments recall the plagues of hail, flood, and darkness that fall on Egypt; and like those plagues, they stop short of extermination, being intended for humiliation and warning.

(5.) The letting loose of a hellish malice for a season.†

(6.) The loosing of "four angels, which are bound in the great river Euphrates." That river, which was mentioned by Isaiah and Jeremiah as the source from which chastisement would come to Judah, must represent the peoples and multitudes that sustain the mystic Babylon (chap. xvii. 15); and a great force among them, held in for a time, breaks forth. A mighty host goes out to kill and slay.

After seven thunders have been uttered, and vision had of the death and resurrection of two witnesses,‡ the last step in the series is reached.

(7.) Great voices are heard in heaven. Under the seventh

* Chap. viii. 7-ix. 21, xi. 15-18.

† Renan regards the opening of "the pit of the abyss" as a singular anticipation of a reopening of the crater of Vesuvius ten years later!

‡ The allusion seems to be to Moses and Elias (chap. xi. 6); but two witnesses stand for sufficient testimony. See Matt. xviii. 16; 1 Tim. v. 19.

seal, heaven was silent; but now "great voices" proclaimed the world-sovereignty of "our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever. Therefore the Church, represented by the twenty-four presbyters, give solemn thanks to the "Lord God Almighty."

Some of the historical interpreters give definite meanings to this series in a wonderful fashion. The first trumpet announces the invasion of Italy by Alaric, the second is blown for Genseric, the third for Attila, the fourth for Odoacer. Then the fifth sounds for Mohammed, the scorpion locusts that have power for four months meaning one hundred and fifty years of the dominion of the Saracens; and the sixth trumpet proclaims the Turkish invasion of Christendom and capture of Constantinople. Professor Murphy explains the first as announcing the fall of Judaism; the second the decline of Paganism; the third the rise of Christian heresy; the fourth spiritual depotism; the fifth Antichrist (apparently Popery); and the sixth the rise of Islam.* All this seems to us arbitrary in the extreme. The cycles of visions repeat the same lessons and warnings, announcing judgments and distress of nations before the coming of the Lord. Yet they are, as we have said, not mere repetitions. The revelation under the trumpets is an advance of that under the seals. It shows more fully the agencies to be employed for and against the Church, and mentions evils and oppositions which are yet more clearly developed under the next revolution of the wheel.

IV. Seven bowls of wrath poured out.

1. Here also there is first a scene of heavenly worship and triumph.† Victors stand by the crystal sea mingled with fire, as on a shore of safety, singing "the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb." We are, of course, reminded of the song of Moses and his triumphant host on the shore of the Red Sea. In that ancient ode of victory, they

* "Book of Revelation," translated and expounded by Jas. G. Murphy, LL.D., 1882, pp. 62-81.

† Chap. xv.

sang "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" In this they sing, "Great and marvellous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. Who should not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name, for Thou only art holy?"

This prepares for judgment on oppressors. Seven angels come out of the temple; and to them one of the Zoa delivers seven golden bowls or goblets full of the anger of the ever-living God. The action of the living creature is significant, because the plagues or blows are about to fall on the various regions of creation, the earth, the sea, the fresh waters, and the sun.

2. As the bowls are successively poured out by the angels, the seven last blows or plagues fall upon men,* and recall several of the plagues inflicted on Egypt. The parallel between these and the judgments under the trumpets is very remarkable.

TRUMPETS.

- (1.) Fire and blood on the earth.
- (2.) Fire and blood on the sea.
- (3.) Wormwood on rivers and fountains of water.
- (4.) Darkness of sun, moon, and stars.
- (5.) A fallen star—the opening of the abyss—darkness—locusts.
- (6.) Loosing of four angels in the Euphrates, and issuing of a great host to hurt and destroy.
- (7.) Consummation, with announcement of Divine judgment: voices, thunders, lightnings, and hail.

BOWLS.

- (1.) Grievous sore on the earth.
- (2.) Blood in the sea.
- (3.) Blood in rivers and fountains of water.
- (4.) Scorching heat from the sun.
- (5.) Darkness on the throne of the Beast, and in his kingdom.
- (6.) Drying up of Euphrates—appearance of three unclean frog-like spirits—gathering of kings to war.
- (7.) Consummation, with announcement of Divine judgment: voices, thunders, lightnings, and hail.

Is it not quite plain that these do not describe consecutive periods of history? They have such a coincidence, as plainly indicates that they set forth, by line upon line, and in the old Hebrew style of repetition with expansion, the same principles of Divine judgment. And so soon as we perceive this, we are quite cured of that fashion of interpretation which finds, under

* Chap. xvi.

the first bowl, the atheism of France at the end of last century ; under the second, the bloody guillotine ; under the third, the wars of Napoleon I. ; under the fourth, the political paroxysm of the year 1848, &c. &c. It is a flighty and hazardous way of handling sacred prophecy.

The woes under this cycle hurt none of the servants of God. As the plagues in Egypt fell on the enemies of Jehovah, but not on Israel, so the last plagues will fall on Christ-rejecting powers and peoples of the world, but touch none of the followers of the Lamb. "Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee : hide thyself for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For behold, the Lord cometh forth out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity ; the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain." *

* Isa. xxvi. 20, 21.

REVELATION.

No. III.

ADVERSARIES.

LIKE the prophetic parts of the Old Testament, this Book has much to say of the hostility which the cause of God must encounter on the earth. It refers in a most uncompromising tone to the enemies who organise and lead this hostility, describes their temporary success, their pride and cruelty, but shows that their end is ignominious destruction. The whole subject, however, is idealised. The ancient prophets specified by name the hostile nations and their kings; but the seer in Patmos has no command to denounce human adversaries. He exposes wickedness, and predicts its defeat and punishment under symbolical forms, as the genius of the Apocalypse requires.

I. The Adversaries unveiled.

The disclosure is gradual. Under the first cycle (Churches), mention is made of Satan's synagogue at Smyrna and Philadelphia, Satan's throne at Pergamos, where a faithful martyr had been slain, and of an ominous resurrection of the doctrine of Balaam, and the idolatry of Jezebel. Under the second cycle (seals), we read of a cruel power that had slain many for the Word of God and the testimony which they held, and was yet to kill others, "their fellow-servants and brethren." Under the third (trumpets), we see a wild beast rise out of the abyss, and kill the two prophetic witnesses. But it is between the third and fourth series that the great discovery of devil-inspired hostility is made; and immediately after the fourth cycle

(bowls), the perdition of enemies is shown to the seer in terrible detail.

It has always been the policy of evil to counteract good by counterfeit or parody. So there appear (1) a Triad of the dragon, the wild beast, and the pseudo-prophet, as a blasphemous caricature of the Holy Trinity; and (2) a wicked city, Babylon, as the counterpart to the holy city, Jerusalem.

1. The Triad of Antichristianity.* The dragon, the wild beast, and the pseudo-prophet have the same will and purpose, and act in a certain order of subordination, the third to the second, and the second to the first. The dragon gives his power to the wild beast, which in turn leads men to worship the dragon. Then the wild beast gives his power to be exercised by "another beast," who is a false prophet, and who in turn induces men "to worship the first beast."

The parody here is as obvious as it is profane.

HOLY TRINITY.	BLASPHEMOUS TRINITY.
(1.) The Father of lights, the God of truth, who "loves the Son, and has given all things unto His hand."	(1.) The great dragon, the father of lies, the ruler of the darkness of this world, who has given power to the beast.
(2.) The Son, the Lamb of God, the King of glory, who has sent the Holy Ghost in power to guide men into truth and peace.	(2.) The wild beast, arrogant and cruel, whose power is exercised by a false teacher, misguiding men, and doing great wonders.
(3.) The Holy Spirit, who has come down from heaven to testify to the Lamb and impress His name and image on the saints.	(3.) The pseudo-prophet, coming up out of the earth, and impressing on men "the mark, even the name of the beast or the number of his name."

What is revealed in this Book concerning these three adversaries may be summarily stated as follows:—

(1.) The *great red dragon* is the "old serpent" of Genesis. He is called *devil* (slanderer), and *Satan* (enemy).† The original serpent became, in later tradition, a dragon, or combination of serpent and crocodile, and was supposed to emerge

* Chaps. xii., xiii.

† Chap. xii. 9.

from the waters. He appears in the stories of many nations. In Persian mythology, Mithra conquers the dragon Ahriman. In the Greek, Apollo delivers his mother from the serpent Python, and Perseus rescues Andromeda from the dragon of the sea. In Scandinavia, Sigurd, the hero, vanquishes a dragon: and the Christian myth of St. George and the dragon is known to every one. All these monsters are shadows of the great Apocalyptic dragon, who shows seven crowned heads and ten horns, in token of worldly ambition and glory.

In a heaven-picture appears "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars." These symbols recall Joseph's dream, in which his father was the sun, his mother the moon, and the eleven stars were his brethren.* We infer that the woman is Israel, the virgin daughter of Zion. The old serpent, having been warned long ago to expect punishment from the woman's seed, watches anxiously in order to destroy the "Son given" to Israel so soon as born. This child is the Messiah, born to rule nations. We know that Herod, acting for the dragon, sought to kill the young child. But the providence of the heavenly Father preserved Him, and, after His work on earth was done, He returned to the father; "He was caught up to God and to His throne."

There the dragon could no longer assail the virgin's Son, for he had been cast down from heaven with his angels, never to enter it again. He therefore turned his wrath against the woman, but prevailed not; for, though sore tribulation fell on Judah and Jerusalem, the Church in Israel was saved. The Christians had no force with which to resist the "flood" that threatened them, but they betook them to the wilderness, and "the earth swallowed up the flood." At Pella the mother Church of Jerusalem was saved and nourished, so that the rage of the dragon came to nought. This, too, was for "a time, and times, and half a time," viz., the $3\frac{1}{2}$ years of the Roman invasion of Judea. Thereafter the dragon proceeded to stir

* Gen. xxxvii. 9.

up persecution throughout the world against the Hebrew Christians, and those of other nations who joined their fellowship. "And the dragon waxed wroth with the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her seed which keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus."

(2.) *The Wild Beast.* The meaning of this symbol is obvious to a reader of the Old Testament.* It denotes not a spurious religion, but unhallowed strength and violence. It expresses what is gross and ignoble by the downward look to the earth, and what is fierce and ruthless by a trampling rending force. The spirit of the beast goeth downward; and the energy of the wild beast is used to ravage and destroy.

Out of the sea, *i.e.* from the midst of troubled nations, emerged the wild beast before the eyes of the Seer; a dreadful monster, having the agile frame of a leopard, the paws of a bear, and mouth of a lion, with seven heads and ten horns. It combined all the bestial forms seen by Daniel; and must be understood as recalling and condensing in one formidable power all the old-world despotisms that oppressed the Israel of God.

The beast took up the persecution of the saints which the dragon instigated. Therefore it can be nothing else than that Roman imperialism which sent the Apostle John himself into exile for his faith, and became throughout all the known world a merciless tyrant to the Christians. The nations ruled over by this empire worshipped the dragon; for the adoration of heathen gods and goddesses is stigmatised in the New Testament as a mere devil or demon worship.†

It may not be denied that during its long career, for it comes down into our own century,‡ the Roman empire conferred im-

* See Ps. lxxx. 13; Ezek. xxxi. 2; Dan. vii.; Hosea xiii. 7, 8.

† See 1 Cor. x. 20; Rev. ix. 20.

‡ A.D. 1806 Francis II. resigned the old imperial crown, and became Emperor of Austria. See Professor Bryce's "Holy Roman Empire," fifth edition, p. 366.

portant benefits on mankind. But it is represented by the repulsive symbol now under consideration, in so far as it appalled the nations by its severity, and tried the patience and faith of saints. All world-tyranny, all use of brute force to repress spiritual life and movement, in whatever age, falls under the same symbol of the wild beast.

(3). *Another Beast*, also termed the *pseudo-prophet*. Though this adversary has the cruel disposition of a wild beast, he does not go forth to push and to rend by violence. His power lies in plausibility of speech, and the performance of signs and wonders, his object being to deceive the dwellers on the earth, and cause them to worship, not himself, but the first beast. To put it briefly: the first is unhallowed power; the second, unhallowed wisdom. The first has protected the second, and the second has supported the first.

In the presence and service of the great despots of antiquity stood their "wise men," magicians, soothsayers, astrologers, and priests. These men never took part with the oppressed people, but supported the arbitrary power by which they themselves were fostered. So it was in Egypt (Exod. vii. viii.); and so in Babylon (Dan. i. ii. iv. v.). In like manner the Roman Court harboured priests, soothsayers, and augurs, who in turn were the obsequious servants of the imperial despotism.* It seems to be this influence which is expressed by the false prophet of the Apocalypse, an impersonation of deceit, opposing the spirit of truth by lying wonders, and even by "calling down fire from heaven in the sight of men."

The pseudo-prophet induced men to worship the image of the wild beast, *i.e.* the imperial statue or effigy. Emperor-worship was a familiar thing in Ancient Babylon. The immense golden image which Nebuchadnezzar set up represented

* There was a god of the augurs and magicians, who was said among the Etrurians to have been born out of a furrow or hole in the ground. He was represented with the two horns of a ram. The coincidence with the origin and form of the second beast is worth notice. See Hislop's "Two Babylons," third edition, p. 376.

his own imperial grandeur.* To fall down before that image was to revere his power and serve his gods. Without even the intervention of a statue, Darius was made an object of adoration, and prayer was forbidden to be offered to any other god for thirty days. At Rome also, and wherever the Roman power was felt, the emperors were deified even in their lifetime at the instigation of the heathen priesthood: and just as at Babylon devout Jews were subjected to the test of presenting religious homage to the despot, so throughout the Roman Empire the test applied to Christians was that of paying the same homage to the figure of the emperor, or image of the beast. If they refused compliance, they were at once liable "to be killed." †

In other modes, and in later times, unholy wisdom has counteracted that which is from above; but the primary meaning of the symbol now before us surely is the priestcraft and sorcery that supported and served a persecuting empire.

2. A wicked city, Babylon, which "made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornications."

There is here symbol on symbol. The city is shown to the seer as a woman impure and proud, shameless and cruel. He lost sight of the pure woman whom the dragon hated in "the wilderness;" and now, in "the wilderness," he sees an impure woman whom the dragon favours and the wild beast supports. What is this but a professed Church become spiritually unchaste, *i.e.* idolatrous, and resting on the Christ-hating world? The harlot on the beast is corrupted religion seated on worldly power. When ancient Jerusalem admitted heathen gods and altars within its precincts, it was said that "the faithful city had become an harlot." But Babylon was the very metropolis of idolatry joined with impurity and pride; and the woman whom John saw had upon her forehead this

* Compare Dan. ii. 37, 38, with iii. 1-7.

† Pliny's Letters, Book x. 67.

terrible name, "Mystery,* Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth."

The angel tells St. John unambiguously, "The woman which thou sawest is that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth." † This can be no other than Rome; and certainly Rome became the metropolis of heathenised Christianity, allied with a thoroughly Babylonish arrogance and cruelty.

It is evident, too, that the apostasy here pointed out reaches far and wide. The mother of harlots corrupts many kings and nations. She has the support of the empire, the kings, the peoples, multitudes and tongues. What is indicated, therefore, is not only a proud departure from the primitive "simplicity toward Christ," but one that is diffused over the earth and boasts of being oecumenical.

When the adversaries of the Lord have reached the height of their ambition, judgment begins to fall on them from heaven.

II. The Adversaries destroyed. The last to appear is the first to perish, and the first is the last.

1. The wicked city falls. The plagues of Babylon "come in one day: death, and mourning, and famine." The harlot is stripped and burnt. Of course the fall of the city is to be taken symbolically, and not as the actual destruction of walls and buildings. It is the overthrow of the great organisation of apostate Christianity—an overthrow so complete as to fill the world with cries of astonishment. ‡ But then much joy will be in heaven, for the removal of the harlot will make way for the appearing of the faithful Church, the wife of the Lamb: the destruction of Babylon clears the Apocalyptic stage for the disclosure of the holy city.

* Mystery is in the New Testament a thing long hidden, now developed and disclosed.

† Chap. xvii. 18.

‡ The doom of the apocalyptic Babylon recalls Isa. xiii. xiv. xlvii.; Jer. l. li.

2. The wicked Triad is broken up and destroyed.

The wild beast and his supporter, the pseudo-prophet, perish together. After the fall of apostate Christianity there will still be hostility to Jesus Christ on the part of kings and nations of the earth. Having thrown off a corrupt and idolatrous religious system, they will be averse to all religion, and resist the claim of Christ to be "King of kings and Lord of lords."

A great contest ensues, to which the hosts are gathered under the sixth bowl of wrath (chap. xvi. 14). But the actual conflict does not occur till after the fall of Babylon, which is under the seventh bowl or vial.* This battle is symbolical, not literal. We are never to think of the Lord Jesus Christ as asserting His rightful power on the earth by onsets of cavalry, or the slaughter of wild beasts, princes, and soldiers, amidst the screaming of vultures assembled for a ghastly feast. The only sword wielded by the King of kings is the sword of His mouth, and no weapons are seen in the armies from heaven that follow Him. His sharp mouth-sword or word suffices to slay the opposing kings and armies—*i.e.* to subdue and extinguish national opposition to Christ; but that mouth-sword has no effect on the beast and the pseudo-prophet. It is not even applied to them. They are cast alive into a "pool of fire and brimstone." Thus these formidable symbols of evil activity are committed to an element which totally consumes. In other words, the influences which they represent and impersonate come to such an end that they can never rise or reappear among the sons of men.

Last of all comes the doom of the dragon. He has been cast out of heaven into the earth.† Let that be the first stage of his discomfiture. The second will be when he is bound with a chain and cast into the abyss, there to be confined for a thousand years. Though sin will not be wholly expunged from the earth during that period, the active power of the

* Chap. xix. 17-21.

† Chap. xii. 9.

tempter will be restrained, and the saints will be free from his wiles as well as his fiery darts.

But the dragon is to be let loose again, and wickedness will have a brief revival on the earth. Satan will come out of prison incorrigible and incurable as he entered it—the inveterate impersonation of malice and deceit. Terrible fiend! The sight of Eve's innocence stirred in him no pity. The manifestation of the Son of God brought him to no repentance. A thousand years of restraint in the abyss teach him no submission. He is no sooner at large again than he resumes his old employment of deceiving the nations and assailing the saints.

But the cup of his iniquity is full; and he reaches the third and final stage of his discomfiture. The confederacy which he leads against the holy city is scattered by devouring fire from heaven, and then he himself is overtaken by his doom. "The devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also are the beast and false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."* After all his pride and power as god of this world, to this ignominious end must he come, to lie powerless in the baleful pool. It is not, as the mediæval notion was (not yet extinct among us), that the devil is to be a king in hell, tormenting at his pleasure lost souls of men, but that he himself is tormented; as hitherto the most active of sinners, hereafter the most helpless; as more wicked than others, so in the end more miserable.

It is in many respects a gloomy theme that we have discussed, but it is one that may not be omitted or ignored. It certainly conflicts with that complacent philosophy of history which bids us look forward to unbroken progress and improvement. The Bible, and this book especially, while giving to our hope brighter prospects than any human philosophy or even poetry has conceived, warns us of enemies that will never be reconciled to God, and must be punished, and of apostasy which will incur the heavy judgment of the Almighty. We

* Chap. xx. 10.

wait for His judgments, because without them the brighter prophecies can never be fulfilled.

“Haste then, and wheel away a shattered world,
Ye slow-revolving seasons ! We would see
A world that does not dread or hate Christ’s laws,
Where violence shall never lift the sword,
Nor cunning justify the proud man’s wrong,
Leaving the poor no remedy but tears.”

REVELATION.

No. IV.

CONSUMMATIONS.

THROUGH dark vistas of judgment our thoughts are conducted to wonderful results of brightness and peace. The marriage of the Lamb, the millennial reign, the beloved city of the saints, paradise restored, a new heaven and new earth, the end of pain and sorrow, the everlasting kingdom, all dependent on and secured by the appearing of Jesus Christ—such are the glorious issues of this Book of prophecy.

The subject is one which ought to be treated with much circumspection and caution, for two reasons—

(1.) We must not be positive about the order of time. Prophecy is not so constructed as to map out the future in chronological succession to every eye. The prophetic glance may dart from one salient point to another, leaping over long intervals of time; and we may not speak of one future event following closely on another but with great diffidence. It is also to be remembered that the events of our own era were veiled from students of Old Testament prophecy as regards the order of accomplishment; and this should serve as a warning against confident assertions of the exact course of fulfilment awaiting the Apocalyptic predictions in this Book.

(2.) There is a serious difficulty about the second coming of Christ. Many passages in both Testaments connect His advent with the establishment of His kingdom on the earth; and it is taught in the 19th chapter of this Book that He will be re-

vealed from heaven with attendant saints before the millennium; that He will then subdue His enemies, and introduce a reign of righteousness and peace. There are, however, many other passages, of equal authority, which describe our Lord as coming with flaming fire to judge the world; and the last judgment is certainly after the millennium.* On this interpreters have broken into parties, as pre-millennialists and post-millennialists; and then, as is not uncommon in controversy, each party, occupying itself with the parts of Scripture which favour its distinctive theory, becomes more and more confident in its own opinion.

We believe that both views are true, and have good support in Holy Writ. The language of inspiration regarding the *Parousia* of our Lord covers both the pre-millennial and the post-millennial view, though in a way which we may not yet be able to apprehend or explain. Partisans on either side may demur to this statement, on the ground that the predicted coming of our Lord is to be one decisive event; and they may demand of us to take one side or the other, to choose one horn of the dilemma; but we decline to admit any dilemma in the case. It is not within the power of man to tell us now what may or may not be enclosed within the truth and fact of the Lord's second coming. Only the future can determine. The prophecy regarding Messiah in the Old Testament seemed to intimate only one advent for all purposes; but we now perceive that it covered a double advent, a coming in weakness, and a coming in power; a coming to suffer, and a coming to reign. There is no reason why the prophecy in the New Testament regarding the second advent may not unfold a double import; the more so that the language touching the resurrection of the dead, though often seeming to point to one event, unfolds a double import, a resurrection of the just, and a subsequent uprising of the unjust.

It is clear that Christ will come to quell His adversaries, reward His servants, and bring in millennial peace; but it is

* Chap. xx. 11-15.

not clear whether or not that appearing will be visible to the world at large. Enough that it will be quite appreciable by His saints. He will interpose in such a way that they who follow Him in the great battle of God Almighty, will know right well Who it is by whom they are led, and to whom the victory is due; and they who reign in life upon or over the earth will know well who it is with whom they reign as kings and priests to God. But this does not exhaust the prophecy of His appearing. At the last day He will come in His glory, seen by every eye, to judge the quick and the dead. Let us endeavour to keep all this truth honestly in mind. Much better retain all the affirmations of Scripture concerning the second advent, even though we may be at a loss to adjust them together, or see their consistency, than take one or the other half of what the Bible has said, and arrive at a very simple view and positive conclusion, through means of a one-sided, partial interpretation.

With the caution which these considerations teach, let us try to group together the lessons of the Apocalypse regarding the things hoped for.

I. *The millennial blessedness.* Whether or no one thousand ordinary solar years are intended, a definite period is fixed, during which the meek shall "inherit the earth," and the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be "given to the people of the saints of the Most High."

Strange to say, there are those, and some of them interpreters of great reputation, who hold that this period is already past. But any explanation of the millennium which makes it enclose the dark ages of Europe, is to us incredible; and nothing but respect for some of those who have propounded such a view prevents our calling it absurd. Others (as Dean Vaughan) take it to be an indefinite expression for the whole Christian dispensation; but this puts the whole Book out of joint, and creates far more difficulty than it removes.

All we know about the future millennium is, that the saints shall no longer suffer on the earth, but reign. The Church,

which is the bride of the Lamb, will shine forth in glorious perfection. Here, again, symbol is heaped upon symbol. The "Wife made ready" is seen as a holy and beautiful city,* in contrast to the harlot who has been judged, and who also appeared as a city cruel and impure.

The vision of Holy Jerusalem recalls a similar one in the Book of Ezekiel.† When that prophet was in exile, and the city of Jerusalem was desolate, he was "brought in the visions of God into the land of Israel," and set upon "a very high mountain, by which was the frame of a city on the south." He proceeds to describe that ideal city and its temple. Now was John in exile, and Jerusalem lay desolate; and he was taken "in the spirit," or in the visions of God, "to a great and high mountain," where he saw Jerusalem in splendour "descending out of heaven from God."

The city described has within it the glory of God; a brightness as of jasper, or rather of what we call the diamond, clear as crystal. A city gate in the east was the seat and symbol of justice and power. This city has twelve magnificent gates, each one "a several pearl." The gatekeepers are holy angels. The names inscribed on the gates are those of the twelve tribes of Israel, God's covenant people, in contrast with the "names of blasphemy" seen on the mystic Babylon.

The foundations of the walls are twelve precious stones; and on them are inscribed "the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb," not one, as St. Peter, but all the twelve complete. This indeed is noble fame. Where are the names of those who treated the Apostles with contumely as the offscouring of all things? The high priests and elders who imprisoned them, the emperors and governors who sat in judgment on them, where will their names be found? In oblivion or in infamy? But the very foundations of the city of God must crumble away before the names of the twelve Apostles can be lost.

The wall is great and high: and the city itself a cube of unparalleled size. That which Ezekiel saw was very vast, as

* Chaps. xix. 7, 8, xx. 9, xxi. 9, &c.

† Ezek. xl.

measured by an angel. But we are not to literalise the measurements in one case or the other. In Hebrew symbolism, all consideration of symmetrical form is subordinated to that of religious significance. And it is as absurd to materialise the holy Jerusalem as it is to literalise the cherubic figures.

The city is of pure gold, a symbol of entire sacredness. In Scripture, silver is the metal of commerce; gold of royal dignity and sacred value. It is especially mentioned that "the street" is of pure gold; not the streets, but the broadway or place of civic concourse. It is implied that daily intercourse, public opinion, and social life will all be pure and holy to the Lord.

Mere externalism in Divine worship is ended. No more need of temples made with hands, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of the holy city. Nay, the very sun and moon shall be needless in the blaze of Divine glory, shining on the city of the saints.

There are kings and nations, not dwelling in the city, who bring offerings and homage to its gates. This, too, is in contrast with what has been said of great Babylon, which weakened the kings of the earth who supported it, and hurt the prosperity of nations. The crowning glory of Jerusalem in this vision is its purity. The earth itself will not be purged of all impurity till it is renewed by fire; the nations, even in millennial times, shall not be free of plagues, for they require "healing;" but the city, symbolic of the Church, will admit no unclean persons, idolaters, or liars, but those only "who are written in the Lamb's book of life."

O blessed *Civitas Dei*! The ransomed shall see it with still greater joy than filled the way-worn and war-worn Crusaders, when at last they looked on the city which had drawn them from afar, and shouted Jerusalem! Jerusalem!

The vision is prolonged so as to show us Paradise restored. The waters of Eden and the tree of life reappear. The former flow in one shining river from the throne of God and the Lamb

which is within the city.* The latter stands "in midst of the street," or chief place of concourse, open to all the citizens; and such trees line both banks of the river, yielding fresh fruit every month. The curse which fell on man for disobedience in Eden is now removed. It is a paradise of obedience. The servants of God openly honour and serve Him; therefore they shine in His light, and reign for ever and ever.

Yet this "for ever" has its bounds. It goes to the end of the millennium, but there is much beyond. We have seen that there will be, after the saintly reign on the present earth, a revolt of wickedness. Instigated and led by the devil, a host of adversaries will surround and threaten "the camp of saints and the beloved city." But God will defend His own, and bring all this embattled wickedness to a sudden and terrible end. "Fire came down out of heaven and devoured them." . . . "Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." †

Then, for those who are written in the book—

II. *Eternal glory.* The farthest stretch into the future vouchsafed to the seer is that of a new birth of the world which man inhabits.‡ Many thinkers and bards of ancient times sighed for a new birth of nature. This hope is alike in the Greek philosophers and the Sibylline books. But to us it is no mere dream of students and poets; it is the promise of God according to St. Peter; it is the vision that St. John had in the Spirit; and we are with the Apostles and prophets when we look through all the periods of tribulation and judgment to that glorious change.

"The first heaven and earth" pass away. These words are not used with scientific precision. They are in harmony with the phraseology of the first chapter of Genesis, where we read that "God called the firmament heaven," and "the dry land

* This also is a reproduction of the river which Ezekiel saw issuing from the sanctuary and giving life whithersoever it flowed.—Ezek. xlvi.

† Chap. xx. 7, 15.

‡ Chap. xxi. 1.

earth." Heaven and earth just express man's dwelling-place, with that element of air in which we move and are enveloped.

We have learned from the Second Epistle of St. Peter that this "passing away" will be with a great tumult of fire. Every one now believes that this globe has undergone in long past ages more than one great change, ere it was ready to be peopled by Adam and his descendants. If, as many think, it was occupied in one or other of its former conditions by a pre-Adamite race, it militates not at all against our faith, rather it strengthens it by analogy. What we believe is that another great change is to ensue, the present earth and sky passing away, in order that a new dwelling-place may be prepared for the children of God.

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth,"—the same, yet not the same, because gloriously renewed in symmetry and beauty by the Almighty power, and adapted to the residence of beings of a higher physical, intellectual, and moral order than the children of Adam—viz., the children of the resurrection; a world as far superior to this as this excels the dismal earth that existed before the Creator fitted up Adam's dwelling-place, a scene of vast thickets and marshy flats, where, through the gloom, huge saurians sought their prey and "dragons tare each other in the slime."

In the arrangement of heaven and earth described in Genesis, the sea has prominent mention; but in the new home of the blessed, St. John saw "no more sea;" no separating waste of briny waters; sweet fountains and rivers of pleasures, but no cruel, restless, stormy sea.

The saints are gathered to God in safety while the old world is being wrapped in fire and the new world is born. Then they occupy it. The holy city, new Jerusalem,* comes "down from God out of heaven." At last Abraham's vision of faith is

* Observe the distinction in name between the millennial city (chap. xxi. 10) and the eternal city (chap. xxi. 2). At chapter xxi. 9, the revolving wheel takes us back from the new earth to the millennial peace on the present earth.

realised to the full; "a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." The millennial saints, and all the holy ones of all time, have a congenial home. God is with them, for the era is reached when Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom, and "God shall be all in all." There is no more death or even pain, and sorrow is ended, all tears having been divinely wiped away. If this world has been a vale of tears, a bed of pain, a field of death, it shall have its bright counterpart in that world where joy is full, anguish unfelt, death impossible.

At the same time that these glowing prospects are disclosed, it is most distinctly and carefully laid down that they belong to none but the holy and obedient. "He that overcometh shall inherit these things, and I will be his God, and he shall be My son; but to the cowardly, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death."

The epilogue to the Book of Revelation (chap. xxii. 6-21) corresponds to its brief prologue. It enforces the authority of the Book, and emphasises the hope of the Lord's coming. The order of speech in it seems to be this:—

The angel, v. 5.	The Lord, v. 7.	The seer, v. 8.
,, v. 9-11.	,, v. 11-20.	,, v. 20, 21.

The angel (of chap. i. 1) dwells on the faithfulness and truth of the Revelation. The Lord says, "Behold, I come quickly," and pronounces a blessing on him who keeps the sayings of this Book. The seer adds his testimony, "I John am he that heard and saw these things."* Again the angel announces the imminence of the things revealed, and draws a deep line between the righteous and the wicked. The Lord repeats the intimation of His coming; proclaims Himself the first and the last; defines who they are that will be admitted into the holy city, and who

* Notice the same turn of expression in John xxi. 24 and 1 John i. 1-3.

will be shut out, warns against all tampering with "the words of the book of this prophecy;" and then, for the third time, declares, "Yes, I come quickly." The seer replies with the grand and simple prayer, "Amen. Yes come, Lord Jesus!"*

The twenty-second chapter is a noble conclusion of the Book, and the Book a noble conclusion of the Bible. The last sweet note of a piece of music dwells in the listener's ear. Even though in a lengthened piece there may have been many varieties of musical expression, and among these wild piercing strains and pealing tumults of sound, the composer and performer take care to produce the last notes round and soft, to fill, soothe, and satisfy the sense. And may not this Book of prophecy be likened to a mighty oratorio in which there is one all-prevailing, oft-recurring air, "Behold, the Lord cometh!"? There is a splendid burst of sound, then a sustained difficult passage, then a gentle or a pensive melody; now a solemn recitative, and then a high strain and grand chorus of sublimity, in which, from the open heavens, myriads of voices join. But as this magnificent composition draws to a close, the notes are loving, simple, and sweet. After ecstasies that move every power of the imagination and every feeling of the heart, all is ended in a prayer that Christ would come, and a kindly benediction of all saints. So terminates not this Book only, but the Bible, the complete book of God, and therefore the book of love. The words fall with soothing cadence, and linger with us when more brilliant passages are lost. "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints."

* Compare John xxi. 23.

THE END.

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