

THE
CHRISTIAN FRIEND

And Instructor.

PAPERS FOR THE COMFORT AND EDIFICATION
OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD.

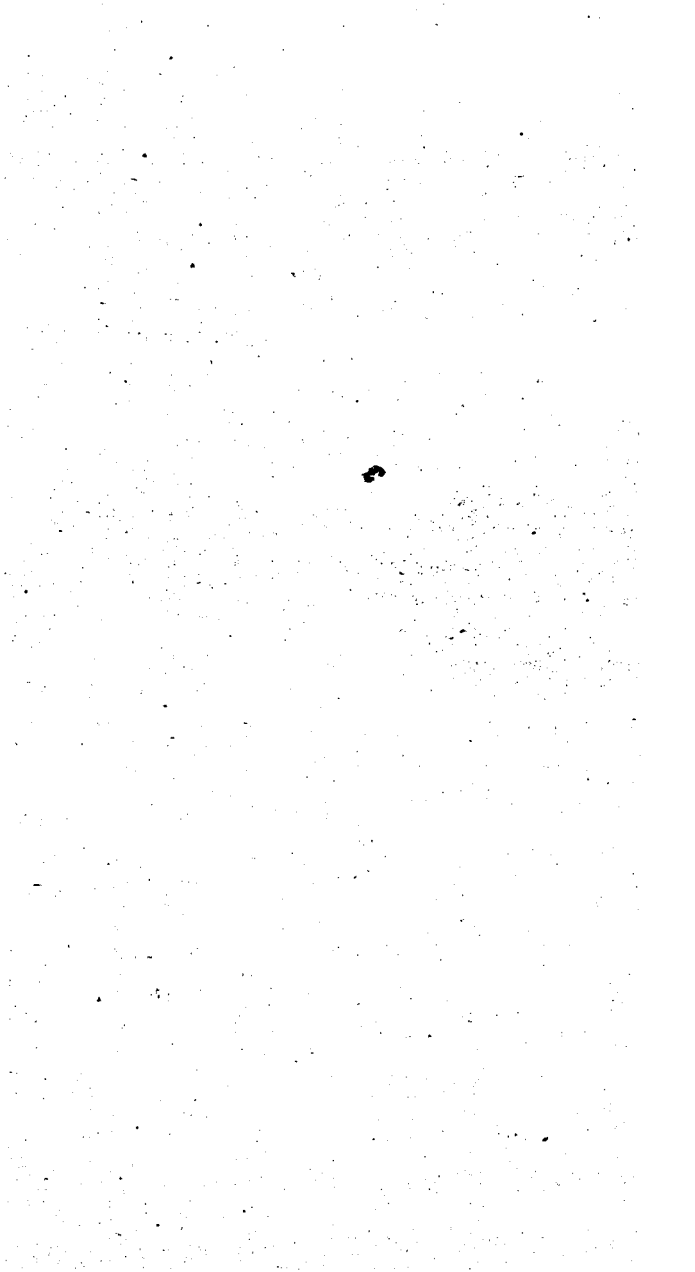
"Hold fast the form of sound words."—2 TIM. i. 15.

"Exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching."—HEB. x. 25.

"Building up yourselves on your most holy faith."—JUDE 20.

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THE CHRISTIAN FRIEND.



MEDITATIONS ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

CHAPTER V. 1-11.

WE are then justified by faith. With that the teaching about the work of Christ in a manner closes, in so far as it deals with His blood, and the putting away of our sins through the shedding of the same. The resurrection of Christ is the proof that God has accepted this work as satisfaction for our sins, and assuredly for His own glory. What a blessed thought! The righteousness of God rests in the value of the work of Christ. This righteousness has revealed itself in the fact that He has raised His Son from among the dead, and has justified us on account of Him: our sins are forgiven, we are washed white in His blood. We have contributed nothing, and can contribute in nothing, to our justification; we are justified solely by the work of Christ. Our sins are the only part we have in the sufferings of Christ, by which we are cleansed before God. The value of this work becomes our portion by faith, which, however, can add nothing to it. This work is our highest motive for serving Him and praising Him unceasingly, but in so doing we add nothing to the work

of Christ before God; it is complete, and not only that, but it is accepted and acknowledged as entire satisfaction before God. How blessed it is to know that all our sins are put away by God Himself, and conformably to His own righteousness; whilst He has raised Christ, on account of the work which He has accomplished for us, an eternally existing proof that God has accepted this work as fully satisfying His glory. This would be enough for our justification, but God has done yet more. He has raised Christ to His right hand, and He is seated there now as man, until His enemies be made His footstool. "By *one* offering^e He hath perfected for ever" (with regard to the conscience) "them that are sanctified." If they are not perfected through this offering, they never can be, neither can their sins be put away. For without shedding of blood is no remission, and Christ cannot shed His blood once again for us; the work is done, or it can never be done.

In the first part of chap. v. (vv. 1-11) we have a summary of this infinite grace of God in all its aspects. Let us briefly consider the contents of these precious verses. The work is accomplished; faith knows that God has accepted it, because He has raised Christ and seated Him at His right hand. Nothing remains but the value of the work of Christ, and the acceptance of His person between God and man, born again and sanctified. The blood of Christ is always before the eyes of God, and He Himself appears in the presence of God for us. This gives us, in the present, blessed privileges, as well as the hope of glory in the future which we shall enjoy with Him. However, we will not go outside our chapter, but limit ourselves to the consideration of the perfection of the grace of God, so

wondrously therein developed. We find here what God is for us, whilst our standing before Him in Christ is treated of later on.

The first eleven verses contain the development of the grace and gracious ways of God; they speak first of what grace gives, and then of the experiences of its recipients. Christ having been delivered for our sins, and raised again for our justification, we are justified by faith; it is a complete justification; our sins are effaced, our conscience is purified, and because the value of this work is eternal and immutable before God, so our justification is for ever valid. Consequently we are in the possession of constant peace with God. No sins can be imputed to us, for they are all already borne, so that we can no longer have any consciousness of sins. We have indeed the knowledge of the existence of sin in the flesh, but it can no longer be a question of the sins which Christ has already borne. We may well humble ourselves, if at any time something occurs to remind us that we were guilty of those hateful fruits of the flesh, and of bringing this load upon the beloved Saviour; but in the presence of God, where Christ and His blood are for ever present, we can never question whether all is forgiven. It is important that I should not confound the state of my soul with the value of a work accomplished outside of me, in the accomplishment of which I had no part, unless indeed my sins. If, however, my sins were there laid on Christ, they cannot now be any longer before God. Christ has not got them on Him in heaven. If I think of myself before God, I see on the one side nothing but infinite, unchangeable love, because Christ is there; and, on the other, nothing but perfect and divine righteousness in Him, also because He is

there. Infinite love, perfect and divine righteousness, are the part of the believer in Christ before God.

This leads us a step farther in the consideration of the fruits of grace. Not only are our sins put away, so that we have peace with God, but we can also *enjoy* the grace of God by which peace is made, grace which is now ever in the heart of God for us. Grace has not only set aside every obstacle through the work of Christ, but it remains ever the same in the heart of God. His eyes rest upon us with the same love as on Christ. Through Christ we have peace, through Him also access by faith into this³ grace and favour in which we stand in Him before God. Not only does the heavenly *Judge* justify us, but a heavenly *Father* receives us; the light of His gracious countenance, beaming with a Father's love, illumines and rejoices our souls, and comforts our hearts, so that we can be in His presence and walk before Him with perfectly restful hearts; we have the blessed consciousness of standing in the favour of God. With regard to our sins, they are all put away; with regard to our present condition before God, all is love and favour in the bright light of His countenance; with regard to the future, we await the glory; it is our portion, although we do not yet enjoy it. Peace, divine favour, the hope of glory, such is the portion of the believer, the blessed fruit of God's love.

Here some one might say, "Then we have that which is needed for the past, the present, and the future." The apostle has still, however, something to add. The glory being still a thing of the future for us, there remains a path to be trodden in order to reach it, and God does not forget us along the road. Therefore the apostle says, "*Not only so, but we glory in tribulations also.*"

The desert is the place where the experiences of the redeemed are made with regard to their actual condition and the governmental ways of God. Redemption is accomplished; we are brought to God, as it is written: "I have borne you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." This is a present accomplished fact, determined beforehand in the counsels of God. The glory forms part of the counsels of God, and it must also have its fulfilment for those who are justified. The wilderness forms no part of these counsels, but it is the place where we learn to know His ways with us. The thief on the cross indeed went to be with Christ in Paradise the same day, to dwell with Him there. His condition was fit for such a position. If he has to suffer from man the consequences of his misdeeds, Christ bore all for him of which he was guilty before God, and the justified sinner follows Him the same day straight to the mansions of bliss. But he had no long pathway of experiences to traverse. The believer in general has to tread his pilgrim way through a world, where difficulties and temptations meet and surround him on all sides. We are called to walk in the footsteps of Christ, who has passed through this world before us, and thereby our *state* is tested. Our redemption is not thereby called in question, for it is that which has brought us into the wilderness. But we are responsible according to the calling and position in which redemption has placed us, to walk worthy of God, who has called us to His own kingdom and glory.

Tribulations test our souls as to how far self-will is working; they make manifest the operations of sin, that we may be able to detect them. God probes us. We learn on the one hand what we are, and on the other

what God is for us in His faithfulness and daily care. We are weaned from the world, and become better able to perceive and appreciate what is heavenly. So the hope which is already in the heart becomes clearer and brighter. This is the light in which to view all our afflictions, because we possess the key to them all—"The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." The providential care of God in this respect is wonderful. "He withdraweth not His eyes from the righteous." He thinks of all which concerns His children, their characters, circumstances, and temptations; He does all that is necessary to bring them to the blessed end of their pilgrimage. After forty years' wandering in the desert, the feet of the children of Israel did not swell, neither did their clothes wear out. He makes all things work together for good to them that love God.

There remain several more important points to be considered. We find the Holy Spirit mentioned here for the first time. The Holy Ghost shed abroad in the heart is quite another thing from the new birth. We must indeed be born again to receive the Holy Ghost, but the sinner needs something more than the new birth. In this passage the Holy Ghost is looked upon as the seal given to the believer of the value of the blood of Christ, and of the perfect purification in which he participates through its application. Washed from his sins, he becomes the *habitation* of the Holy Spirit. He is the unction, the believer's seal, and the earnest of the glory. Through Him we cry, "Abba, Father." (Gal. iv. 6.) Through Him we know that we are in Christ, and Christ in us. (John xiv. 16-20.) And here, in this passage, we learn that by Him also the love of God is shed

abroad in our hearts. God's ordering for the purification of the leper (Lev. xiv.) furnishes us with a striking type of what takes place now with believers. The leper was first washed with water, then sprinkled with blood, and finally anointed with oil. So now the sinner is first converted, then perfectly purified by the blood of Christ, and finally sealed by the Holy Ghost. Through Him we are fully assured of sharing in an accomplished redemption by virtue of our blessed relationship to God and to Christ, as He is the earnest of the future glory. But all flows from the sprinkling of the blood of Christ.

Thus we know God, we become partakers of the divine nature, we have understanding of our redemption and justification, and experience His faithfulness. He reveals Himself to our souls, and reveals to us also the glory which lies before us. We know that we are in Him, and that God dwells in us. So we glory, not only in what He has given us—namely, in our salvation—but in God Himself. A grateful child is not merely happy about all that he has received from his father, but his heart rejoices in having such a father as he has shown himself to be by his loving ways. He is happy because his father is all that his heart could desire; he rejoices in what he personally finds his father to be, and glories in him. What a privilege to be able to boast in God Himself! That makes our joy in, and enjoyment of, grace immense. The highest character of our eternal delight is thus already realized down here, and deep peace accompanies this delight. What God is in Himself is the infinite yet present object for a nature capable of enjoying Him, the Holy Ghost revealing Him to the soul.

J. N. D.

THE POWER OF FAITH.

1 SAM. i. 24-28; ii. 1-10.

It is only as we enter into the future that we have power to walk firmly in the right path in the present. It is what is beyond the present scene that must take possession of the heart, and must form the basis of our spiritual power, here in the midst of this scene; but it is wonderful what power that gives if the heart is in it.

There are almost similar words used here as in Mary's song in Luke i. There is the greatest possible human weakness in both these cases, but we have also what gives mighty power, and that is *faith*. We have need to go on into what is before us, if we are to go rightly in the present. Those who shone in this way were generally those who had a large grasp of God's purposes with His people. This is a remarkable utterance for a woman, such a burst of praise and intelligence. It brings out the full force of that word, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." The glory was about to depart from Israel; but in the midst of it all we have a woman of faith, and it was her *own* faith, for neither Elkanah or Eli entered into it. Hannah's faith went far beyond all the ruin. It was not merely the birth of a little child, but it was that God was about to bring in a deliverance for Israel, and the whole creation of God. "My heart rejoiceth in *the Lord*:" she is outside the immediate circumstances. The last notes of her psalm go on to the extremity of time, and God's purpose as regards His creation. It is important for us

not to border our thoughts by the little circumstances with which we are surrounded; God has counsels concerning the church, the world, the creation, and we can take up these things in spirit. There is not a single promise that God has made in His word that is not now fulfilled to us in Jesus Christ. Every promise of God is mine in Christ Jesus. What enables us to keep the word of His patience, but the certainty that all these things are mine already? We are not here merely as those who are hoping for an uncertain thing, we have the confirmation of the promise in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Six or seven times over Samuel is spoken of as the one who is in the house of the Lord, ministering there, and *growing* there. How few in Israel thought anything about Samuel then, or connected him with the overthrow of the Philistines, or with the establishment of God's counsel. And when Simeon took the Lord up in his arms, who connected the coming day of glory with that little child? *Faith only*. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and a wonderful secret it is—a wonderful thing to be in His secret counsels; and the Lord give us to know these counsels, and to cherish them. We might be disheartened if we looked at things around us; but look at Hannah's faith and Mary's faith—hearts bursting forth in praise, and looking on to the end of time. Only hold all the simple principles, and let the circumstances be what they may, we have Christ at the right hand of God—the anchor of the soul; and we have the secret of the Lord, His thoughts and counsels. And do not let us get narrowed into our little circumstances, but remember that we are bound up with all the interests of the Lord Jesus Christ.

C. Mc A.

JUSTIFICATION, STANDING, AND WALK.

GOD'S righteousness is His acting consistently with His own holy nature and character ; in fact, consistently with Himself. This righteousness has been revealed in the gospel, and displayed in relation to sin and the state of man in the death and resurrection, glorifying and session at the right hand of the Majesty on high of the perfect Man, the blessed Son of God, who glorified Him on the cross, vindicating His nature, His character, and His attributes by dying, in perfect obedience, a sacrifice for sin, bearing at the same time the sins of believers in His own body on the tree.

All the world having been proved guilty (Rom. i. i, ii.), the righteousness of God apart from the law is manifested, "even the righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe ;" so that God is a just God, and the justifier of the ungodly sinner who believes in Jesus.

Now through faith in the blood of Christ, and in God who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification, I am not merely justified as a child of Adam *from guilt*, in virtue of *the blood of Christ*, but also *from sin in a new life*—the life of Christ risen, to which no sin can ever be attached, because He in whom I am alive to God, and in whom I stand justified before God, was made sin on the cross, died for it and unto it, and lives to die no more. "In that He died, He died unto sin once : in that He liveth, He liveth unto God."

But though God justifies me—the sinner—from guilt, forgives my sins which I have committed, and never will impute sins to me as a believer, because Christ's work has perfected me for ever, and He is my righteousness before God, He does not justify my sinful Adam nature, but executed judgment on it, or condemned it at the cross. (Rom. viii. 3.) Justification has thus a double aspect—justification in virtue of the blood from guilt and sins through faith in Jesus dead and risen, and justification of life from sin and condemnation by means of death, Christ's one act of obedience (Rom. v. 18) when He died for sin and unto sin upon the cross. Being now alive in Christ to God, and having died *with* Christ, my moral end has clearly come as standing in Adam-nature and responsibility, or in flesh, before God. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." "Our old man is crucified with Christ." "He that is dead is justified from sin." "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

But the work of the Lord Jesus, which settled the question of the responsibility of the child of Adam, and ended his moral history in death, after judgment had been executed on his sinful nature on the cross, is the work which also puts the obedient, perfect Man, on whom the judgment was executed, into the glory of God, according to divine righteousness, and the believer into the same place of acceptance in Him, though the glory be not come. The cross is thus for God the judicial setting aside and end of the first man, Adam, and the righteous ground for setting up and glorifying the second Man, the last Adam, who endured in grace the judgment due to the first man, and who in an

entirely new place is "the beginning of the creation of God."

Now redemption brings me out of one place or standing into another. Christ died "the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." I was found in Egypt exposed to judgment, and am brought *through death* to God, not in flesh, but alive in Christ risen, who died not only to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, but to end on the cross the moral history of the first man and the world, and then rose in the power of the Spirit of holiness to take, as fruit of the cross where God was infinitely glorified, a new place, which man had never occupied before, on the other side of death, and in the glory of God. And now beyond death, the world, sin, God's judgment, and Satan's power, there in divine favour and redemption glory He stands, the One ascended up far above all heavens—Man according to God's eternal purpose in God's own presence, and Head of the new creation. And I, a wretched, guilty worm, who had turned my back upon God's claims, His grace, His goodness, and His love, stand there in Christ, made the righteousness of God in Him through the riches of God's grace and the redemption which is in Christ Jesus—His place as Man before His God and Father, mine, "to the praise of the glory of His grace wherein He has made us accepted in the Beloved." This glorious standing is fruit of the work of redemption, God's righteous answer to the cross; and the responsibility and walk of the believer flows from his standing in Christ, now alive from the dead, risen and ascended on high.

In Romans we have the exhortations: "Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God in Jesus Christ our Lord." "Yield yourselves

unto God, as those that are alive from the dead . . . yield your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." As still upon earth, and in the body in which sin once reigned, but in which the Spirit of God now dwells, so that I am not in the flesh but in the Spirit, I am to walk as one whom God has brought to Himself, justified from sin, delivered from its slavery, and, as not under law but under grace, to yield my body to Him to whom it now belongs.

In Colossians—being risen with Christ, I am taken out of the world entirely, and am to walk as one dead to the world, its philosophy, its philanthropy, and traditions. "If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?" "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

In Ephesians, being seen as of the "new creation" seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, suited to God's blessed nature, holy and unblameable before Him in love, His Son glorified as Man the absolute measure of my relationship, nearness, acceptance, and spiritual blessing, I am to exhibit God's nature and character, as of this new creation, in the sphere of the old creation here below. "Be ye imitators of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." "Once ye were darkness, but

now light in the Lord: walk as children of light: proving what is acceptable to the Lord."

Two great facts set forth in this epistle help me to recognize my Christian responsibility. First, the truth as it is in Jesus which I have learned is, that I have "put off the old man and put on the new, which after God is created in righteousness and holiness of truth;" and second, having heard the word of truth, the gospel of my salvation, and believed in Christ, I have been sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the day of redemption. All that springs from the old man "put off" is therefore unsuited to my profession, and how can I lightly grieve the One whose permanent indwelling in my body, now become God's temple, is the strongest testimony to the abiding value of the precious blood by which I am redeemed to God.

J. S. O.

God has a way in the world where Satan cannot touch us. This is the path where Jesus walked. Satan is the prince of this world; but there is a divine path through it, but no other, and there God's power is. The Word is the revelation of it. So the Lord bound the strong man. He acted by the power of the Spirit, and used the Word. The Spirit and the Word cannot be separated without falling into fanaticism on the one hand, or into rationalism on the other—without putting oneself outside the place of dependence upon God and of His guidance. Mere reason would become the master of some, imagination of others.

J. N. D

THE BOOK OF HAGGAI.

CHAPTER ii. 10-19.

THE message contained in this section is addressed to the priests, and connects itself historically, as may be seen from verse 18, with Ezra iii. 8-13. Its object was to teach the nature of true separation unto God, and that His blessing was connected with its maintenance—a principle which obtains throughout all dispensations, because it is grounded upon the holiness of God Himself. (See Leviticus xi. 44, 45, and 1 Peter i. 16.) In Malachi we read that “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” (chap. ii. 7); and it is on this account that Haggai was sent “in the four and twentieth day of the ninth month,” two months since his last message, to ask the priests these questions concerning the law.

“If one,” said the prophet, “bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No.

“Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean.”

Before entering upon the application of these truths, which the Lord Himself made, through His servant the prophet, it will be good for us to consider their importance. No priest, instructed in the law, could have answered in any other way. Read, for example, the directions for the Nazarite (Num. vi.); and the ceremonial

directions, found everywhere in Leviticus, concerning cleansing and defilement—all of which contain principles of the deepest significance for believers in every age, for ourselves now, even though we rejoice in the truth that Christ by one offering hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

The meaning then of the answers, given by the priests to Haggai (answers which, it should be observed, are grounded on the sure word of God), is, first, that a holy thing has no power to sanctify; and, secondly, that uncleanness must defile everything it comes into contact with. Let us look a little at these two things. It is necessary, first of all, to be clear as to what is meant by a holy thing. It is that which is set apart for the service of God; and thus "holy flesh" might be, for example, a part of an animal which had been devoted to God in sacrifice. (See Leviticus vii. 28-36, etc.) It was not therefore that which is intrinsically and absolutely holy from its very nature. God is thus holy, and such holiness is necessarily exclusive of evil, even as light is exclusive of darkness; but a holy thing in Scripture is that which is consecrated, set apart for God. Israel as a nation was holy in this sense, because they had been taken out from all the other peoples of the earth, and separated unto God; and in like manner every thing they themselves, under divine direction, devoted to God's service was holy. But whatever was holy in this way had no power, as we learn from our passage, to sanctify other things. Well had it been for the church, as also for individual believers, if this lesson had been laid to heart, for the attempt has been made in every age to accomplish that which the Jewish priests declared to be impossible. For example, the

prophet Isaiah says that they must be clean that bear the vessels of the Lord; but how has Christendom carried out the spirit of this requirement? By ordination and consecration, as if the recitation of solemn words, and a human touch, even though it were from a holy hand, could sanctify to the Lord's service, or a "holy" office make the holders thereof holy. The same remark applies to the "sacred" things and places that abound on every hand, all of which are made "sacred" by one bearing, as it were, "holy flesh in the skirt of his garment," and by "touching" claiming to impart holiness to them. All this is but a parody upon that which is really and divinely sanctified; and whenever the church seeks to appropriate the things of the world by her "holy" contact for her own use and advantage, she does but betray her ignorance of her true place and character, and become defiled by the very things she has sought to sanctify. It is on this very account that her "holy" orders of men and things and places are but the evidences of her own corruption.

The second principle does but affirm the above conclusion. Uncleanness must defile, but what is the uncleanness spoken of? It is of one who had been clean, but who has been rendered unclean by a dead body. Now death is the fruit of sin, and this therefore is the source of the defilement. (See Num. vi., xix.) It is not then, applying the truth to ourselves, the uncleanness of a sinner before God, but that of a believer who has become defiled by evil associations; and the solemn lesson concerning such a one is, that, like pitch, he pollutes everything he touches. What a responsibility then rests upon us individually in our fellowship with the saints of God! Have we become defiled

through unwatchfulness, through contact with a "dead body"? and do we mingle with the saints, as if all were well with our souls? Ah! how little do we remember the effect of our state one upon another. Again, Do any plead that believers, whatever their associations, should be welcomed into the holy fellowship of the saints, in their breaking of bread and prayers? Let them read and ponder the truth of this scripture, and then let them confess that nothing that defiles, if it be known, can be associated with the holy name of Christ. As with individual believers; so with assemblies, the responsibility is to be holy because God is holy.

The prophet, having received his answers from the priests, applies the truth to their own condition. He answered and said, "So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean." The significance of this solemn statement is evident. Israel—for the restored remnant occupied the place of the nation before God—were a holy people, separated unto God. But this entailed upon them the responsibility of walking according to the place they were in by God's sovereign grace; to be for Him to whom they were separated. What, however, do we find? At this moment God's mind was on the building of His house; their minds were on their own houses. (Chap. i.) They therefore, out of communion with Him who had called them, were for themselves, and not for Jehovah; occupied with their own, and not with His things. They had thus become practically defiled; they had lost, so to speak, their Nazariteship, by becoming unclean through contact with the dead body of their own selfish thoughts and desires. And what was the

consequence? The work of their hands was defiled, and so also were the sacrifices which they laid upon Jehovah's altar. Themselves unclean, they polluted everything they touched; and nothing they did, whether in their daily occupations, or in their professed worship, was acceptable to God. And what a lesson for ourselves in this day is thereby taught! We may never be so diligent in activity, or in the assembling ourselves together with the saints; but if we are not right with God, if we are not maintaining our separation, if we have ceased to judge ourselves, and to confess our sins, both our work and our worship are defiled. We have this same lesson taught in the epistle to the Hebrews. After having pointed out that it is the privilege of the believer to have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, the apostle proceeds, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." (Chap. x. 19-22.) Having the way open into the holiest, and every qualification for entering into it, we may yet not be able to avail ourselves of this unspeakable privilege because of our practical condition. The want of a true heart, a heart that has no reserves before God, that has been fully exposed in the light of His presence in self-judgment, may prove, and will prove, an effectual barrier before the new and living way which Christ has initiated for us through the veil. And should we, in forgetfulness of our practical state, seek to appear before God, like Israel, we shall only in like manner as they defile our offering. (See also 1 Cor. ix. 27-29, 1 John iii. 19-22.)

But through grace the word of God, as before delivered by the prophet, had already reached their

consciences, roused them from their indifference and neglect, and, producing in them a sense of their failure, had brought them back to Jehovah. From that moment His things, His house, occupied their minds, and, animated by the encouragement ministered to them through the Lord's tenderness, they proceeded to lay the foundation of His temple. And the object of the Lord in this new message to His people was to call their attention to the change of His attitude towards them since they had become obedient to His word. Thus from verse 15 to 17 we have a description of His dealings with them while neglecting His house. God could not, consistently with His holiness and with His love to His people, bless them when their hearts were turned back from Him, when they were using His grace, in their restoration from captivity, as a means to their own ease and comfort. He therefore dealt with them in judgment, chastising them, to awake them out of their spiritual torpor, and to teach them the lesson which God's people ever need, that their true blessing and prosperity could only be found in the Lord's ways, and not in their own. This explains the words of the prophet :

“And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward” (*i.e.* looking back upon the past, the word “upward” being used in the sense of taking a retrospect), “from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord” (when the people said, “The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built”): “since those days were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the pressfat for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting, and with mildew, and with hail, in all the labours of

your hands; and ye turned not to me, saith the Lord." (*vv.* 15-17.)

Such was the past condition of the people, and so hardened were they, that they were insensible to the chastisements of the Lord—they turned not to Him. But at length, as we have seen, the Lord's object (as must ever be the case) was attained, and He stirred up the spirit of all, from the highest to the lowest, "and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." (Chap. i. 14.) It is in reference to this, their spiritual restoration, in fact, that the prophet proceeds with his message:

"Consider now from this day and upward" (the word "upward" here being used in the sense of forward), "from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig-tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you." (*vv.* 18, 19.)

From a comparison of chap. i. 13-15 with this scripture, it will be perceived that it was exactly three months from the time when the people commenced to work on the Lord's house, that the foundation was laid. This time would be spent in the necessary preparation; and it is striking to observe that the Lord did not begin to bless them until the foundation was laid. He waited during those three months to test His people's hearts, the reality of their restoration, to work in them a sense of their past condition, and thus to prepare them to receive the blessing which He was about to bestow. It is always so in His ways with His people. His heart towards them never changes, but the manifestation of

His heart must depend upon their condition. His heart is always to bless, and if He withhold blessing, it is only because of their spiritual state. And then, when by His grace there is true self-judgment and confession, there is yet oftentimes much work to be done—as in the case of Peter, for example—much searching of heart to be undergone, before He can make them enjoy again the sense of His restoring grace and love. So in our passage. The people had laboured for three months in obedience to Jehovah's word, and now when they, at the end of this period (a period doubtless of much reflection and self-examination), had reached that which was nearest to the Lord's heart, the foundation of His temple, He proclaims that from that time He would bless them; for now they were walking according to the place in which they had been set. Separated as they had been to God, a holy people, they were now for Him—for Him who had called them. They had therefore lost their uncleanness, their Nazariteship was restored, and thus the work of their hands and their offering were no longer rendered unclean (*v.* 14); and God's heart was free to go out towards them in abundant blessing.

It is ever so in all dispensations. The blessings here promised to Israel were temporal, in accordance with the economy under which they were; but the principle of blessing, as we have often shown, is the same for believers now. Whenever God's people are walking in subjection of heart to His word, in communion with His own mind, they are in the sure and certain path of blessing and soul-prosperity. And nothing short of this satisfies God's desires for His own. He has in His grace brought us into fellowship with Himself and with His Son Jesus Christ, and it is our blessed privilege to

enter upon the enjoyment and realization of this unspeakable blessing. But to do so will involve, as it did in their measure with the remnant, the losing sight of ourselves and our things, that we may be absorbed in God's thoughts, aims, purposes, and desires. But if we examine ourselves, or if we test the various activities and the manifold ministrations of the truth of this day, we shall have to confess how little any of us know what it is to rise to the full height of our calling. But in doing so lies the secret both of strength and blessing—to live in the power of the Spirit even now in a region where man disappears, and God is all in all, where it is our joy to be occupied with His things, and where we want nothing because we are satisfied to the full in the circle of unbounded grace into which we have been introduced, and in which God has condescended to associate us with His own purposes, as well as to link us with the glory of His beloved Son.

And we may add, in conclusion, that whenever the heart of a believer responds through grace to God's call to walk thus with Him, this word, "From this day I will bless you," will be found as true as when spoken to Israel by the prophet. E. D.

"SANCTIFY THE LORD GOD IN YOUR
HEARTS."

WE have to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts. (1 Peter iii. 15.) Failing this, we take refuge in "a confederacy" (Isaiah viii. 12-14), some scheme of our own, for we are unable then to see things on God's side. In Gen. xx., Abraham had left the plains of Mamre, and was

sojourning in Gerar. He was on the edge of the place of blessing, and not in the heart of it; and instead of the Lord being his fear and his dread, he is afraid of the king of Gerar. This leads to a confederacy, an unholy compact between Abraham and Sarah to deny the true and rightful place of the latter; and the mother of the promised seed, the child of holy laughter and joy, is taken into the house of Abimelech. What degradation! when the Lord should have been their sanctuary. Yet so it is. But that is only looking at it from their own side, and on that side there is failure, sorrow, degradation, rebuke, and the involving others in judgment, but for God's merciful interference. If we look at it from God's side, what, we may ask with reverence, were His thoughts as He saw the depositaries of all His promises, both for the heaven and the earth, making a compact which in result separated the mother of the seed of promise, in whom all nations were to be blessed, from him who was the "covering of her eyes," and placed her in the house of the king of Gerar. It is when we see the church as the vessel in which there is to be glory to God in Christ Jesus through eternal ages, and in which angels are now learning the manifold wisdom of God, that we could consent to nothing, if we sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, which would falsify its position with regard to Him who loved it and gave Himself for it, that He might present it to Himself. On man's side, Paul spoke foolishly in commending himself to the Corinthians; but it was the earnestness that was jealous over them with a jealousy of God, for he had espoused them to one husband, that he might present them as a chaste virgin to Christ.

EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS.

I.

"THE Church is the temple of God. Among its services it has to teach angels, to edify itself through joints and bands in the Holy Ghost, to lead those outside to own God in the midst of His saints, to exercise discipline, to worship as a holy priesthood, and to show forth the Lord's death. It is moreover 'the pillar of the truth,' and as such must keep itself erect and firm. The writing on it is to be large and legible. Nothing is to be allowed to shake or blot it. Some may claim a right to try their hand with it, and plead many pretences. They may talk of brotherly forbearance, the gentleness of Christ, the duty of not judging another man's servant. But the pillar must still hold itself firm and inviolate. No such pretensions or pretences, nor any other, can be listened to. And occasions will arise when the integrity of the pillar is to be guarded with increased vigilance because of the enemy. . . .

"And let me say, I honour the service of those who keep watch in the camp. The trumpet is made, among other purposes, for sounding an alarm on the approach of an enemy. All we can desire is that it may be used with *priestly* skill, and when it has called the camp into action, that the action itself be conducted according to the mind or word of God; for the battle is to be in His name, and for His kingdom. . . . I hold, as at the beginning, the broken, ruined condition of the Church. I know, and still would testify as ever, that 'the great house,' with its different vessels, is around us. I will say, as before, that no gathering of the saints can assume to be the candlestick in the place, and treat as darkness all that is not of itself; such order and

such authority are gone. This we have ever said and still say. But with all this, we avow it, that we are not together as a convention—a voluntary convention of believers, but as part and parcel of the Church; and we have to take heed, that the principles and testimony of the house of God be preserved among us, according to our measure in the Spirit.

* * * * *

“We have to take heed that the order and testimony of the house of God pass through our hands *without contracting defilement*. And indeed I would add, for my own admonition specially, dear brother, that we also have to take heed of heartless exercise of the mind^o over principles or doctrines. God is not to be so served. ‘My son, give me thy heart.’

“September 18th, 1849.

J. G. B.”

II.

“I WAS much struck in reading Luke iii. this morning. The Lord's land, and the rightful heir to it just born in a manger, parcelled out among Gentiles; and an anomalous condition in the religious polity of Israel, two high priests. Then a voice breaks in on this state of things, but it is not the rams'-horn trumpets of Joshua's day, claiming the land for the Lord. That would not have been confessing the ruined condition and the sins of Israel. John is not driving back Jordan to prepare the way of the Lord, but calling a people down there to confess their sins. It is taking the true place before the Lord of utter failure, and this remnant Jesus joins. He can attach Himself in grace to such, and when taking that position was sealed by the Holy Ghost, and owned by the Father's voice. How good it is to be in the secret of the Lord! In later days He writes the name of His God, and of the city of His God, and His own new name, on the lowly remnant who hold fast His word and do not deny His name.

T. H. R.”

THE LORD'S LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE.

THE Lord takes notice of every circumstance, every shade of difference in assemblies, as also in individuals in them, thus showing that He is not indifferent as to the state of His people by the way—their daily steps—because He has secured blessing for them at the end. His love is not a careless love. We have all, more or less, lost sight of the judgment exercised by the Lord in “His own house;” and it is too frequently supposed that because the salvation of the saint is a sure thing God is indifferent about character here. But to love—this is impossible. A child would be sure eventually to inherit his father's property; but then what parent would be satisfied, if he loved his child, with knowing that? Would he not anxiously train him up, watching every development of his mind and faculties, and ordering all things in his education so as best to fit him for his future destination? How much more is this the way of God's love with His children!

We have to remember that the Church, and indeed every individual saint, is set in the place of direct conflict with Satan, the more so because of the high standing and privilege given us in Christ. Now it may be in triumphant victory, as it is said, “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” To effect the purposes of God's glory, coming in as it will by-and-by, when He shall establish His kingdom, we know that Satan must be fully dethroned; but in order even now, ere that time comes, that we realize our blessings in heavenly places, it is needful he should be practically dethroned from the heart through the power of the Holy Ghost.

J. N. D.

“AT HIS FEET.”

LUKE x. 39; JOHN xii. 3.

(From the French.)

SILENTLY the hours were passing,
As she sat at *Jesus' feet* ;
One blest voice all else surpassing ;
Self is hushed in that retreat.

Wondrous place of lowly nearness
Mary chose with Him alone ;
Lord, may we too know its sweetness,
Take her place to be our own.

At *Thy feet*, when grief's dark shadow
O'er our desert pathway lies,
We shall find Thee in the sorrow,
Thou wilt wipe the weeping eyes.

Jesus, Lord, though man despise Thee,
We would pour upon *Thy feet*
All the wealth of hearts that prize Thee,
Precious ointment, pure and sweet.

One there was, when man betrayed Thee—
Heaven records it to her fame—
Who, for death, with cost arrayed Thee,
Loved Thee in Thy garb of shame.

Saviour, every crown in glory
Will be cast before *Thy feet*—
Feet that tell of Calvary's story,
Tale of love divinely sweet.

Till that day, oh, keep us near Thee !
We would at *Thy feet* abide,
Whilst our voices rise to praise Thee,
Son of God, once crucified.

MEDITATIONS ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

CHAPTER V. 12-21.

THE first part of the epistle ends here, (verse 11), and with it, we may say, the doctrine of the whole epistle. Our standing in Christ follows, as well as the experiences made by the soul in entering into this standing. Then we have exhortations to those who are delivered. Our standing is not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, or in Christ. But in order to be truly delivered we must indeed learn experimentally what the flesh is; then, and only then, shall we pass from a legal condition of soul into that which is spiritual in Christ, by virtue of the death and life of Jesus Christ. But we shall return to this later on. We must next consider the standing itself, or rather the two positions, and the respective teaching thereupon. It is of importance here to remark that deliverance has to do with experience, and can only be known in this way. It is otherwise with the forgiveness of sins. It is indeed true that God must teach us in all things; but to believe that something outside of me has been done, or has come to pass, is quite different from believing something about myself of which I do not find the practical realization in myself. The work of Christ on the cross, by which I obtain forgiveness and peace, in so far as it has to do with forgiveness, is a thing accomplished outside of me, and I am called to believe that God has accepted it as satisfaction for my sins. It is indeed the work of God that I believe this, but the thing in itself is simple.

A child who has to be punished understands perfectly what it means to receive forgiveness. But if any one says to me, "If you believe, you are *dead to sin*;" I reply, and indeed rightly so, if I am earnest and sincere, "That is not true, for I feel its power in my heart." Now this question, our *condition*, is treated of in the second part of the epistle to the Romans. Are we in the flesh or in the Spirit? Are we in Christ, and Christ in us? Are we thus dead to sin, or are we merely children of Adam, so that sin exercises its power in us even when we would not have it so?

Chapter v. 12 opens up the consideration of this question. The apostle speaks no longer of what we have *done*, as in the first part of the epistle, but of what we *are* in consequence, it is true, of Adam's sin. By the disobedience of *one* many (that is to say, all those who stand by birth in relation to him as their father) were made sinners. "Wherefore, as by *one* man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (v. 12.) The continuation of this statement is found in verse 18. Verses 13-17 form a parenthesis, the object of which is to show in what relation the law stands to this question, and to prove that man without having received a law from God is under the yoke of sin, and subject to judgment. Death is the proof that sin reigns over all men. Adam was under a law, he was forbidden to eat of the fruit of a certain tree. The Jews, as we all know, were nationally under the law. Now, if Adam did not observe the original commandment, nor the Jews the law of God, they were positively guilty in those points wherein they had disobeyed. They had done that which the law had forbidden. Verse 14 refers to

what is said of Israel in Hosea vi. 7. "They like Adam have transgressed the covenant." Adam, like Israel, stood in relation to God by a positive law. With the heathen it was otherwise, they possessed no law. They had indeed a conscience, and obedience to God was obligatory, but one could not say that in this or that point they had transgressed a known commandment of God, because there were none. No law existed for them, and so what they had done could not be reckoned to them as *transgression*. But *sin* was there; conscience was aware of all that was done contrary to its voice, and death reigned. The dominion of death proved also the existence of sin, of which it was the consequence. Each one, even if not under the law, had defiled his conscience, and death was the constant proof of the existence of sin. The Gentiles, who had no law, died just as much as the Jews.

Were the operations of grace to be limited then to the narrow circle of Judaism, because the Jews alone possessed the promises and all the privileges of a revelation, specially the word of God? On the contrary. Christianity was the revelation of God Himself, not merely of the will of God with regard to man; therefore this revelation necessarily reached far beyond the limits of Judaism. In Christianity there is no nation singled out with a law given to them. To Israel a law was given which taught what man ought to be, but it did not reveal God. It was indeed accompanied by promises, but promises which were not yet fulfilled; and at the same time it forbade approach to God. But Christianity revealed God in love in the person of the Son; it proclaimed perfect redemption through His death, a perfect present justification through faith, in

virtue of His death. It testified that the veil which shut out God was rent, so that access to Him is perfectly free, and the believer can draw near in full liberty by this new and living way. Thus eternal blessing is not in the *first* and sinful man, nor yet through the law. For this, if applied to him, could not do otherwise than condemn him, because it is the perfect and divine rule of conduct for man; and since man is a sinner, it places all who are subject to the law under the curse. The blessing of God is in the *last* Adam, the *second* and truly glorified Man, after having *previously* been made sin for us, in Him who met the power of Satan and subjected Himself to death, although He could not be holden of it; who bore in his soul the curse and the forsaking of God, and whom God raised from the dead and seated at His right hand as Man, having been perfectly glorified by His work. A God who has revealed Himself in such a way could not be God only of the Jews.

In verses 15-17 the apostle shows that grace far surpasses sin. If (v. 15) the consequences of Adam's sin do not remain limited to him, but extend also to his descendants, how *much more* the consequences of the work of Christ abound to those who are His! According to verse 16, through Adam's sin all his descendants are lost; but grace, the free gift, is not merely efficacious for the lost condition, but also for *many offences*. The abundance of grace shines forth particularly in verse 17, where it says, "For if by one man's offence *death* reigned by one; much more *they*"—one might have thought that it would have gone on "much more *life* will reign;" but no, it says "*they* which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ."

The parenthesis closes with verse 17, and the apostle resumes in verse 18 the thought interrupted at verse 12. The consequences of Adam's fall concern *all*, just as the free gift through the work of Christ concerns *all*. The gospel can thus be applied to all; it goes out to the whole world, to all sinners. In verse 19 we have the positive application. Through the disobedience of *one* man, many, who are in connection with him, that is to say *all* men, find themselves in the condition of this *one*, which is a sinful condition. By the obedience of *one* man, all those who are in connection with Him, that is to say all Christians, find themselves in the position of this one, that is to say in a position of righteousness before God. Adam was the figure of the man that was to come. In the one we are lost, in the other all those who are united to Him are saved, righteous before God. The guilt of a man depends upon what *he* has done; his actual *condition*, on the contrary, upon what *Adam* has done. Adam and Christ are the heads of two races; the one of a sinful, and the other of a righteous race before God, and here life and standing are inseparable. The law entered as a secondary thing between the first and second man. The root of the fallen human race was Adam, the first man. The Head and the living root of the blessed and saved race is Christ.

"Moreover the law entered" as the measure of what ought to have been with fallen man, but never actually was so. The law did not give either life or salvation, but it was the rule of what man ought to have been down here, linked with a promise of life: "the man that doeth them shall live in them" (Gal. iii. 12); but it commanded a *sinful* man not to

sin. Its object was, as the apostle here says, to make the offence abound, not *sin*, for God can do nothing to augment sin; but when sin was already there, He could give a rule that would bring its fruits to light. Thus, although the law formed the perfect rule of conduct for a child of Adam, yet as a matter of fact it was ever a secondary thing. Man was already a lost sinner, and the law brought the fruit of the rotten and corrupt tree to light. We shall see further on that it did even more than this. In this passage we are only told that it makes the offence to abound. →

Truly we see the ways of God in the first as in the second Adam. Man was a sinner, a lost sinner; Christ a Saviour. The law was necessary as a proof of what man was, because it required righteousness from man, according to the measure of his responsibility. The object of the law in the government of God was to manifest man's self-will by disobedience and transgressions, for without law there is no transgression. Now that supposes sin, as indeed it can be seen in the law itself. The judgment of God will be exercised according to man's responsibility in view of what he has *done*, whether without law or under law. His lost *condition* is another thing. He is lost in Adam; the world furnishes a proof of it in a terrible way, and our own hearts even more, if indeed we know them. The disobedience of *one* has alone brought in the *condition*. This condition is not a future judgment, but a present fact; we are constituted sinners. The whole family is, through Adam, in the same condition as he; separated from God, yea, banished in enmity against Him, shut out from His presence, and without even a desire to enter in. Man prefers pleasure, money, vanity, worldly power, fine apparel, in short

anything and everything to God, even when he professes to be one who believes that the Son of God has died for him in love. There is only one object which the world will not have; namely, Christ, and the revelation of God in Him, even though it be a revelation of love. By the disobedience of one many were constituted sinners.

Thus the important truth here set before us is not the guilt produced by wicked works, and the grace by which it is removed, but *the condition of the fallen children of Adam* as a general principle. (Therefore the law is set aside as a secondary thing, although it was valid for the conscience of the Jews, and remains always a perfect rule of human righteousness, and it also established this rule where, supported by the authority of God, it was applied.) In connection therewith we have the introduction of a new or second root of *saved men*, in the risen One it is true, just as Adam is the root of *fallen men*. Adam became head of a race after he had sinned, and Christ in fact was not head of a new creation (although God from the beginning had wrought by His Spirit) until divine righteousness had been manifested in His being glorified. Now when the righteousness of God had been revealed, and applied indeed to us, inasmuch as Christ had been glorified after He had borne our sins and perfectly glorified God in being made sin, Christ becomes for the first time the life-giving head of a new race, accepted of God; and all, from first to last, is the fruit of the unfathomable, infinite, and unspeakable grace of God. Grace reigns, but reigns through righteousness, being founded on the work of Christ. The end is eternal life, and that in its full and true character according to the counsels of God

in the glory where Christ is already entered in righteousness as Man. Righteousness does not yet reign; it will reign in the judgment-day. But then human righteousness, namely, that which was obligatory on man, will form the measure of the judgment; man will then be judged according to the duties imposed upon him towards God and his neighbour, in virtue of God's claims. But grace is the source of salvation for man, because God is love and we are sinners; for grace is the exercise of love towards those who are utterly unworthy in themselves. And love is therein revealed, so that the angels learn to know it by God's ways with us. But God is also righteous, and must maintain His righteousness, and His holiness cannot tolerate sin in His presence for ever. He has proved the sinful condition and guilt of all men, and then He has acted in His infinite love, not merely to give forgiveness of sins (of which we have already spoken), but to prepare an entirely new position according to His own eternal counsels, and for His eternal glory according to what He is in His nature. The carrying out of these counsels, and that in virtue of the work of Christ according to His perfect righteousness, is the expression and the revelation of His infinite love. *Love* has revealed itself in sending His Son and delivering Him up for us to death and the curse. *Righteousness* is revealed in setting Christ, who has perfectly glorified Him, as man at His right hand in divine glory—in *the* glory which He as Son of God already had with the Father before the world was, which, however, He had acquired as Son of man, so that divine righteousness must of necessity give Him this place. And we share in this glory of God, because the work by which God has been perfectly glorified was

at the same time accomplished *for us*. We form part of the glory of Christ for eternity. He would not see of the fruit of the travail of His soul if He had not His redeemed people with Him in the glory. J. N. D.

"NOT WITH THEM WHEN JESUS CAME."

JOHN xx. 24.

It is an important thing to be in the *place* where the Lord can come, and where consequently blessing can be counted on. It is not mere locality now, but to be *morally* in the place; for there is no place of blessing for the soul apart from this. I need not say that those who are *morally* in this place will be found *locally* together on all possible occasions; but it is instructive to see that the *first* is the all-important matter. It reminds us of Abraham's servant. (Gen. xxiv. 27.) Obedience placed him in the way, and then he says, "I being *in the way*, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." He was *in the way*—the path of obedience—and the Lord could come into it too and lead him on therein; for no other path than this can He sanction by *His* presence. I propose to draw your attention to the words "Not with them" in this connection.

Joy is dependent on the soul being at *peace*. It cannot exist without peace. No peace, no joy; but if there is joy there must be peace. Why is there not *more* joy in our souls? The "music and dancing" of the Father's house, the joy already begun, why has it not its continuous echo *there*? Alas! we must confess that it is sadly lacking oftentimes. Is it because we know so little of the wondrous *peace*

He has made, the wondrous results that accrue to us from His victory—a victory over every foe? And where shall we learn what those results are? We must get into His presence to learn them. He only who has won it can unfold to us what He has won.

In Exodus xv. is the song of victory. Sheltered from judgment, Egypt left behind with its slavery for ever, God is with and for His people. Moses there is a type of our blessed Lord. It is *His* song. "Then sang *Moses*." And the children whom grace had delivered joined in the song. This was a beautiful type of what was fulfilled later. "I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." (Psalm xxii. 22; John xx. 17.) But the song was founded on *peace*, for it had been a question as to the *enemy*. The enemies were and are all gone. The battle was the Lord's. The sea is a figure of His death, wherein He destroyed them all. "Sing ye to the Lord, for *He* hath triumphed gloriously." The question, the struggle, was not between the people and the enemy, but between the Lord and the enemy; and because it was so *there is not an enemy left*.

But there is many a tried soul who says, "Well, I wish I could feel that; I have within this wretched principle sin, and is not *that* an enemy still left?" This is a real difficulty to many. It proceeds from unbelief. We must get into *His* company, or, real as the victory is, there will be no experience in our souls of it, and no joy. I must listen to *Him*; HE is singing the song of triumph, HE has vanquished every foe. Since He proclaims *peace*, it must be so, despite my feelings; for it is the Lamb of God "who bore our *sins* in His own body on the tree," and who "taketh away

the *sin* of the world,” who speaks, and because I do not feel that sin in me is gone (for we see not yet all things put under Him) am I to deny that His words are true? Or further, Am I surprised, that I do not *enjoy* what I do not *believe*?

“Peace unto you.” These words were and are His own words of salutation. If there is an enemy left how can he speak thus? “And He showed unto them His hands and His side.” These bore the manifest tokens of the conflict, blessed proofs of the depth of His love, and the cost to Himself of the “*peace*” He proclaimed. But joy was founded on it, for those who had sorrowed were now to be made glad. Our tears are no mere matters of indifference to Him. He who had watched the sorrow gave the joy, and hence we read, “Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.” That word peace had struck the chord of joy, and its echoes rang and rang again in their hearts. Is it so with us? The melody of the “new song” had begun, and its tones are now to sound onward for evermore. Blessed song of unmeasured, untold joy; and blessed those who can already thus rejoice. And its *source*, my brethren, was it that *they* had done anything? They had loved Him, then forsaken Him, and now in sorrow had closed the doors in fear. No, they had done nothing save this. What have we done? It was because *He* had done something that such a marvellous change was to be theirs, and can be ours; and the value of what *He* had done is as eternal as the life of Him who did it. In the value of all that He has done we stand.

But the joy of this new day, thus begun for all His own, is not shared in by them all. Where was Thomas

at this wondrous moment? Had he wandered away again into worldly associations? Was he allowing unjudged affections to cause him, like Lot's wife, to *look back*, if only once more? What kept him away? *I cannot say. Scripture does not say. I only know he was not with them.* "NOT WITH THEM WHEN JESUS CAME." Oh, the inestimable loss! One of the little despised and sorrowing company, yet not there. One for whom He died to bring so near to all the affections of His heart, yet far away. Not there to learn all the results of this wondrous victory. Not there, to be made glad by the only One who cared for them. Can you picture an Israelite's joy left behind in Egypt on the day of Israel's deliverance? or can you picture an Israelite linked up with an Egyptian realising that *all his enemies were gone?*

And for one week at least Thomas knew not what the other disciples knew. He had not heard that word, "PEACE unto you," nor would he believe those who had. Consequently he had not that blessed joy that filled *their* souls, though he as much as they was one for whom Jesus died. "Not with them" the gloomy clouds of unbelief and doubt reigned supreme in his soul, and hid all the brightness of the RISEN SUN; though shining in all its beauty and majesty, he saw it not. The resurrection morning indeed had already begun on the other side of the night of death, but it shed no beams of its light and glory on the path of Thomas. True the Lord had gone down into death and judgment for him, but for him also all was yet shrouded in darkness and fear and doubt. Worthy children these of unbelief and worldly associations.

I have asked myself, my reader, if the experience of

Thomas stands alone in the history of God's children. I have, I trust, profited by the answer, and I would now suggest to you also to ask yourself, in the fear of God, the *same* question. For He who has gone into death for us has *conquered* death and him who held its power, and we are free—free as the winds are free which roam over and take up all the fragrance of the new land of sunshine, and of summer, and of flowers; for this land is now *ours*. (Deut. viii. 7-9; xi. 10-12.) The Spirit is often in Scripture compared to the wind, and we read that the "Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." Yes, we are free for ever, and the authority for saying so is His own blessed word to us.

If we are in the company of the Lord—with Him and with *His*—we are with Him *as He is*, and He is the mighty Conqueror, with the marks of His victory fresh upon Him. Death did not and could not hold Him. The soldiers of earth's mightiest empire, led on by Satan himself, may keep watch and ward, but they keep their watch in vain. Fear and trembling may be found within, where the doors were shut "for fear of the Jews;" but, poor timid ones, you will not shut *Him* out. All must bow before the Almighty One, all must admit *His* claims. Oh, the blessed grace and triumph of being *His*, HIS OWN—sought out to be made glad in that hour of His own triumph; claimed then by Him as "my brethren!" No wonder that joy filled their hearts in His company as He unfolded it all to them. Is He the same Jesus still?

"But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was *not with them* when Jesus came." Few words these, but words full of meaning. And as then so

now, for we repeat in our own experience those who have gone before us. The Spirit ever ministers to us of His things and from Himself, if not hindered by us. To dwell in the sunshine of a new day, a day that knows *no night*, is ours now. It is His purpose to dispel for us all those dreary earthly depressions and anxieties that rightly belong only to those who are not His. Such an atmosphere is not the atmosphere *His* children should breathe. We have not been brought from the want and shame of the far country into all the plenty and rest of the Father's house to have to pass through such experiences as these. They are the fruit of *unbelief*. No; such experiences are never *His* desire for His children. His joy as the Father fills all the house with joy, and are we, its objects, to be the only ones *not* sharing in it? He says, "Rejoice with me; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." (Luke xv.)

H. C. A.

THE BOOK OF HAGGAI.

CHAPTER ii. 20-23.

THIS concluding prophecy, or the message of the Lord through Haggai to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, was received on the same day—the four and twentieth day of the month—as the one immediately preceding. And there is an intimate connection between the two—a connection as evident as it is beautiful. The last words of the former were, "From this day will I bless you." Now the blessing of the remnant in the land became at once prophetic of the restoration and blessing of Israel in the kingdom; but this involves two things,

THE BOOK OF HAGGAI.

as revealed everywhere in the prophetic scriptures, viz., the manifestation of the Messiah, and the judgment of the nations; and it is these two things which are found in this brief prophecy.

The first in order, however, as mentioned here, is the judgment of the nations. The period referred to is exactly defined in a previous prophecy (*vv.* 6-9); but here we have, in addition to shaking the heavens and the earth, the overthrow of the throne of the kingdoms, etc. Concerning this, the question is sometimes raised whether this is the destruction of the beast and the false prophet (see *Rev.* xix. 19-21), or only of the nations that gather themselves together against Jerusalem. On this another has said, "The judgment mentioned in verse 22 appears to me not the judgment of the head of the beast. . . . All that sets itself up against the rights of Jehovah, established according to His counsels at Jerusalem (rights that were identified with the house they were building), should be utterly overthrown. No doubt this is true, in general, of the kingdom of the beast; but the conditions of its existence are quite different. God had put Jerusalem under the power of the head of this empire. The crimes that draw down judgment on him are yet more audacious and intolerable than those of which the nations are guilty." We concur in this opinion. (Compare *Zech.* xii. and xiv.; see also *Isa.* xxiv. xxv. xxix., etc.) For the present the throne of the earth is in the hands of the Gentiles, a throne which they have corrupted and used for their own evil purposes, a throne which has surely become one of godless tyranny and oppression—one that exalts man and shuts out God. Its true nature has already been declared in the cruci-

fixion of Christ; for the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ. "For of a truth," as the apostles said before God, "against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together."

And yet again the heathen will rage and the people imagine a vain thing, and in their rage against the people of God will assemble themselves against Jerusalem. But when thus gathered in all the might of their strength, it is only to meet the outpouring of the wrathful indignation of God, who at length executes judgment upon the earth, preparatory to the establishment of the throne of Him who shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the rivers unto the ends of the earth. The princes of this world reckon not of the coming storm which is so surely and so rapidly approaching; and, in the meanwhile, they delude themselves with their "progressive ideas," and dream of a millennium without God and without His Christ. But this word has proceeded from the mouth of God, and cannot be recalled, "I will shake the heavens and the earth; and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down every one by the sword of his brother."

But there is a star of hope rising up out of this night of judgment in the promise to Zerubbabel. "In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen

thee, saith the Lord of hosts." (v. 23.) We have seen that this prophecy refers to the judgment of the nations on the eve, or rather on the morning, of the thousand years. In what sense then does the prophet speak of Zerubbabel in that day? It will be observed that he alone is addressed in this message, and that he is spoken to in his official capacity as the governor of Judah. Now it is in this aspect that he becomes a type of the Messiah; for, as Jacob prophesied, "the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be;" and as Micah spake, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." (Chap. v. 2.) It is God's Christ who is thus spoken of in Haggai—the One who is both the root and the offspring of David, and who, in relation to Israel, will then sit upon the throne of His father David; "and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke i. 32, 33.) He it is who will in that day be displayed by God as a signet, and as His chosen vessel for the blessing of His people. Thus Isaiah cries, in the name of the Lord, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my Spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." (Isaiah xlii. 1.) These three things, as already stated, are ever connected in the Scriptures—the appearing of the Messiah in glory, judgment of the nations, and the establishment of the kingdom in power and blessing.

And the certainty of the divine word is assured by a threefold affirmation. Three times in one short verse

we find "saith the Lord," or "saith the Lord of hosts." In condescension to the weakness of His people, Jehovah thus lays an immovable foundation for their faith. To Abraham were given "the *two* immutable things" (the oath and the promise) "in which it was impossible for God to lie, that we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us" (Heb. vi.); but to Zerubbabel, and to the remnant through him, Jehovah gave this triple assertion of the unchangeable verity of His word. Though, therefore, the promise still waits, the time is not far distant when He who has made it will accomplish it to the joy and blessing of His longing elect remnant of Israel.

Before closing our remarks upon this book of Scripture, two observations may be made. The first is, that we learn from it the true function of the prophet. (See chap. i. 12-15; and Ezra v. 1, 2.) The prophet was not himself a builder, but his words were used to stir up and to encourage the people to build. This is, we apprehend, the meaning of the statement in Ezra, "And with them the prophets of God helping them." The Lord thus calls one of His servants to one kind of work, and one to another; and it is their wisdom to do and to keep to the work which He gives them. How much confusion would have been spared in the church of God had this truth been remembered! For what has happened? Prophets have turned builders, and builders prophets; teachers have sought to become evangelists, and more generally evangelists have taken to teaching; while pastors have left the care of the sheep for another kind of work to which they were never called; and as a consequence the sovereign grace

of the Head of the Church in the bestowment of gifts has been slighted, and the distinctness of gift has been overlooked. And it is still an evil of no ordinary magnitude—an evil, it may be, the result in measure of the ruined state of things in which we are found; but one for which there is no justification with those who are instructed in the Word, and who are gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The exhortation of Peter needs to be pressed anew upon our hearts and consciences. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter iv. 10); and also that of Paul, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry (service), let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation." (Rom. xii. 6-8.)

The second observation is, that the whole of the recorded service of Haggai is comprised in the short period of three months and twenty-four days. He might have been a devoted servant for years—of this we know nothing; but his work which stands out for special remembrance is that found in this book. And how simple it was; and in Haggai's eyes it might have appeared very insignificant. It consisted of a few short messages—all of which might be delivered in a few minutes! But it is this simple service which God selected to stand out in the light for the instruction of His people in all future ages. Surely it is not the quantity, but the quality of work; and not success, but fidelity, which commends the servant to the Lord. May it be therefore our one desire, in this busy age, to be acceptable to the Lord.

E. D.

FALLING AWAY.

HEBREWS vi.

THIS chapter is one of three passages in the New Testament which Satan has most incessantly used to torture and distress the souls of the children of God. One of three, I say; the other two being John xv. and Hebrews x.

I want you to notice that it comes in here as a kind of parenthesis, and this parenthesis commences at chap. v. 11; and then in chapter vii. he goes on with his subject, "For this Melchizedek" &c. You must connect, therefore, the last four verses of chapter v. with chapter vii. in order rightly to understand it. The apostle is writing to Jewish professors of Christianity, though there were among them a great many real, bright Christians; he is writing to those who had been brought up with the traditional religion of Judaism. And now Christianity had come in; and what is Christianity? Christianity is not outward forms, and ceremonies, and ordinances; but the knowledge of the Son of God—a living Man at the right hand of God—and faith addressing itself to this living One—Christ Jesus the Lord—and finding its all for time and for eternity in Him. Therefore Christianity is a heavenly system, for it has to do with heaven. Judaism was for earth and an earthly system. Satan always delights in drawing people down to earth; it is what he is busy about at this present time; he would have the heart occupied

with anything short of the living Christ in the glory. The object of the Holy Ghost, on the contrary, is to attract the heart, and therefore the hearts of these to whom he is writing, to this living Man, this Christ of God in the glory, and therefore to detach them from all that was earthly and carnal.

The danger of these Jewish converts was, because of persecution, to give up a heavenly Christ, and to turn back again to the earthly ritual which God had set aside. Judaism had had its death-blow in the cross of Christ. It came to an end there; was as a dead thing in God's sight. And what does God do? He sends Titus and Trajan to sweep away the dead body, and bury it entirely from off the scene. Now it is no longer external ceremonies, but the Spirit of God is drawing the hearts of God's ancient people to the person of Christ in glory; and here in chapter v. he is reproaching them with being babes, when they ought to have been full-grown men. In 1 Cor. iii., where he is writing to the philosophizing Greeks, he says, 'Milk for babes and meat for men; but I cannot give you meat, for you are babes, you are carnal.' That which hindered the Corinthians' growing was philosophy, that which hindered the Hebrews was traditional religion; and how much of traditional religion there is in your days and mine you yourselves know, and if He has gathered us out around the person of His Son, and in His name, and has shewn us what the thought of His heart is as to the Church of God, in measure at any rate, it is only His own grace that has done it.

"Strong meat belongs to full-grown men." Now, you will find, he contrasts Christianity, as a spiritual and a heavenly thing, with Judaism, as an earthly and now a

carnal system. Judaism, though originally set up by God Himself, had become this, because Christ had come and been rejected; and therefore all that He had to say to man in the flesh was now over, and everything was to be heavenly, connected with the Man at God's right hand. A babe, therefore, in this epistle, is one who is still associated with that which simply appeals to the senses, and who is not simply and only connected with a living Christ where He is.

"Therefore laying aside the word of the beginning of Christ." I have no doubt the apostle alludes here to Judaism as divinely set up, and Christ as the Messiah, the head and centre of it all; but Messiah, the head and centre, had been slain, and so Judaism was all over before God; and therefore he says you must leave the earthly thing, and go on to perfection, and by perfection in Hebrews he means Christ in heavenly glory. "Perfect" is used in several different ways in Scripture, and you must know the scope of the passage to understand how it is used in each one. Abraham, for example, is told to walk before God and be perfect, and his perfection was to be in absolute dependence on the God who had called him out to be a pilgrim. Israel's perfection again was to have nothing to do with idols—they were not perfect, they fell into idolatry. Our perfection in one way is to be always like our Father, always to show grace; for He makes His sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good. (Matthew v.) Then in Philippians iii. we get perfect twice spoken of, first in verse 12, Paul says, "Not as though . . . I were already perfect," because perfect there means to be like Christ in glory, and Paul says I am not there yet; but a few verses lower down, in verse 15, he says, "Let us

therefore, as many as be perfect," because there perfect is as to the object, having the soul lifted to Christ where He now is in heaven; taken quite off from earth, and linked with Him where He is, and going on to conformity with Him there.

All that you have in the first two verses of Hebrews vi. was common to Judaism, and known quite well by the Jew. There must be "repentance from dead works," and a few certainly knew "faith towards God." Then as to "baptisms," here I apprehend the word means simply washings, of which we know there were many under the Jewish ritual; the priests had to wash their hands and their feet, the victims had to be washed ere they were offered, the defiled had to wash their clothes as well as their persons, &c. Then again as to the "laying on of hands," there was in Judaism the laying on of the priest's hands, and the laying on of the worshipper's hands on the head of the victim. "Resurrection of the dead," too, was perfectly well known among the Jews. Resurrection *out from among* the dead was what was not known to the Jew, but is the doctrine of Christianity. In Judaism there was a measure of light; but the veil was not rent, Christ had not died, and therefore man had not been looked upon as utterly ruined; but now Christ has come, and has gone into death, and been raised out from among the dead, and the heart is linked with Him where He is in heavenly glory; and now the only thing it looks for is for the moment when He shall return and take out from among the dead His own people, His resurrection being the pattern and assurance of theirs.

"Well," Paul says, "laying aside all these beginnings of things," "eternal judgment" too, for every Jew

believed that; but he says, you are not to stop at these things now, but to pass on and learn that the judgment, the eternal judgment you deserved, was borne by another, and having been borne by Him, you can never come into it, you have passed to the other side of death and judgment.

Verses 1 and 2 belong then to Judaism, and verses 4 and 5 belong to professing Christianity. I say *professing* Christianity, for there are two things which are the very kernels of *vital* Christianity. I mean, there is no mention of divine life here, and there is no mention of the *possession*, as a seal from God, of the Holy Ghost. "Once enlightened." What does that mean? "Oh," you say, "that must mean converted." Not at all. In John i. 9, it is said of the Lord Jesus, "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Is every man therefore converted? Not so; but every man coming into the world is brought into the place where the light is shining. But does every man avail himself of the light though it is there? You know it is not so. The sun shines upon this earth day by day, and sheds its light around. Is a blind man conscious of it? Is therefore the sun less shining? The being enlightened is the coming to a man of the good tidings of the gospel, without at all necessitating his receiving them, or being converted by them. Such an one is not left in darkness whether he avails himself of the light or not.

"And have tasted of the heavenly gift." Surely that must mean really converted? No, not necessarily. They may have been moved and touched after a carnal sort. How many a one has come into a gospel preaching, heard of Christ, been deeply impressed for the moment,

thought it a wonderful thing, meant to be a Christian; but there has been no work in his conscience. Like the stony-ground hearers, such receive the word with joy, and give it up for a little trouble. And yet they *tasted* the joy of it, they felt it was a wonderful thing that God could love such as they, and for a moment were touched, but nothing more. They leave the spot where they were thus impressed for the moment, and give it all up—give it up after *tasting* the joy of it, anon with joy received it.

“And were made partakers of the Holy Ghost.” What is a partaker of the Holy Ghost? The Holy Ghost has come down consequent on the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, and is on this earth dwelling in each believer; but dwelling also in what professes the name of the Lord down here, viz., in the house of God; therefore, if I am in the sphere where He is acting, I am in that sense a partaker of the Holy Ghost. In the early days of Christianity, when Paul is writing, people gathered in the name of the Lord, and with the Spirit of God in their midst; and they were very conscious of the presence of the Holy Ghost too in their midst, and also of His miraculous powers. Look at the gift of tongues, for example. The Holy Ghost was on earth giving a testimony to the hearts of God’s people, and to the world also; and He was present in such power, that a stranger coming in became conscious that God was there. There was an atmosphere of love as well as of power that could not but be felt. If, then, a stranger came in and took his place there, he was with an assembly of people of whom the Holy Ghost made one, and in this sense was a partaker of the Holy Ghost. If the Holy Ghost were acting in power,

and a man were in the place where he was acting, he was a partaker of that power—felt its influence.

“And have tasted the good word of God.” This even does not necessarily imply divine life in the soul. I ask you, Cannot an unconverted man admire Scripture? You know he can. He may admire it, feel its beauty and its depth, and yet his conscience not be reached by it. The word of God may be brought to him, and he may see its preciousness, but it may leave him as lifeless as before; he may not be quickened by its means.

“And the powers of the world to come.” “The world to come” is not eternity, but the future habitable earth under the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ, during which time the power of Christ will be put forth, and Satan’s power will be removed from this scene, for he himself will be bound in the bottomless pit. When that time comes, and the Messiah is reigning, the lame shall walk, and the deaf hear, and the blind see, and the sick be healed; but there were beautiful little foretastes of the power of that coming kingdom seen in those early apostolic days. Did not the lame man walk and leap at the gate of the temple (Acts iv.), and the palsied man arise and make his bed? and did not Dorcas, who was dead, come to life again? Do we not read too of their bringing out the sick on beds and couches, that the very shadow of Peter might rest on them, and of their being all healed? and also that handkerchiefs and aprons were taken from Paul’s body to the sick, and that their diseases departed from them, and that the evil spirits went out of them? These are the “powers of the world to come,” and the Holy Ghost says all this may be known, and yet a

person not be converted at all—not have a spark of divine life in him. When the disciples were casting out devils, Judas no doubt cast them out also; for we find from 1 Cor. xiii, a person may have faith enough to remove mountains, and yet not have divine life at all; and Judas doubtless believed in the power of his Master, though there was no life in his soul.

(*To be continued, D.V.*) W. T. P. W.

TRANSLATION.

“Out of Egypt”—called of God!
 (All its curse and bondage gone;)
 Israel takes the Canaan-road,
 There to serve and dwell alone.

Desert-gifts bestrew the way,
 Comforting with staff and rod,
 Fire by night and cloud by day,
 Living streams and bread of God.

Jordan cleaves its judgment-sea,
 Driven back at God's command;
 Over—on to Gilgal, free—
 Israel conquers Canaan's land.

Forward, through the great highway,
 Jesus leads His pilgrim-race,
 Keeping rank, with bright array,
 Purged by Gilgal's power and grace.

There reproach is rolled away,
 Dead and buried through His love;
 There the resurrection lay
 Wakes and waits the song above.

EXTRACT FROM LETTER.

Dead with Christ, by faith we rise
 Far above the bounds of space ;
 There *in* Him, above the skies,
 Seated in the heavenly place.

Quenched is every judgment claim—
 Quenched by water and by blood,
 By one offering of the Lamb—
 Priceless, spotless Lamb of God.

Soon *with* Him in yonder sky,
 There enraptured round the throne,
 Saints will shout the victory,
 "Thou art worthy, Thou alone."

C. F. C.

EXTRACT FROM LETTER.

"I quite admit typical teaching, but I fear imagination. It is to my soul as a delicious wine when it is brought out from the Word. I do not mean by typical teaching the exposition of types in the stricter meaning of the word, but those pictorial touches that come out here and there when passing. The danger in this is the attempt to construct a system, and run one picture into another as a connected whole. This is dangerous. One picture may succeed another, but may shadow things not connected at all. Nor should a saint make an object of getting truth thus expressed. It argues a false taste, and works mischief in others. Plain, solid truth should always be the basis. A good appetite for this is a wholesome sign. It is a sickly appetite that seeks habitual nourishment from delicacies."

F. P.

MEDITATIONS ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

CHAPTER VI.

BUT here the flesh, which will have its righteousness, and the world, which represents itself as a guardian of morality, proffer an objection in order to resist the truth and grace which show man to be lost on account of sin. They say, if by the obedience of one we are constituted *righteous* it is just the same whether we be obedient or disobedient. This objection only proves that he who makes it knows nothing of the truth, that he has no understanding of his already lost condition, nor of the new life which the believer has received, and which being of God cannot tolerate sin.

Let us here observe what important truths are contained in the change of foundation on which man's relation to God rests. The turning-point is the cross, the death of Christ. The old man, Adam's race, has been tried without law, under the law, and then under the revelation of grace and truth when the Son of God was in this world as Man. God Himself was come, manifested in the flesh, not to impute sins, but "reconciling the world unto Himself;" and if the blessing of the race of the *first* Adam had been possible it ought to have taken place then; but it was impossible. People talk much of a connecting-link between God and man, but even God manifested in *grace* and *truth* found none. On the contrary, the death of Christ is the positive, decisive, and definite break between man and God. Not only was man *without* law under sin,

not only was he openly disobedient to the law when *under* it, but in rejecting Christ he thrust back the *grace* of God which shone forth in His divine Person. The Lord said (John xii. 31), in speaking of His death, "Now is the judgment of this world;" and in John xv. 24, "They have seen and hated both me and my Father." Therefore it says, in Heb. ix. 26, "Now once in the *end* of the world hath He appeared." The cross was morally the *end* of man; but at the same time, and by the same fact in the death of Christ, the foundation was laid of the new creation according to the righteousness of God. The same fact which on God's side had put an end to the first man, inasmuch as his race had rejected the Son of God, had also laid the foundation for the new condition of man in the *second* Adam. Christ was made sin on the cross; sin was judged there, and the old man for ever set aside. Now access to God through faith has been made possible; in the resurrection, the *new life*, even as to the body, has been actually brought to light, and the second Man has taken His place *in the glory*. Just as the first man was driven out of the garden, and then became the root of a sinful and lost race, so the second Man is entered into the heavenly paradise as root and head of the saved race, as the righteousness of God which is valid for man; and so *life* and *righteousness* are become inseparable. Forgiveness through the blood of Christ is the strongest motive for an upright walk; the resurrection of Christ in itself unites righteousness and life; it is a "justification of life." (chap. v. 18.)

In the epistle to the Romans the truth that we are risen with Christ is not further-developed. As to the part we have in His death and resurrection, it only says that by

faith we reckon ourselves dead to sin, that the glorified Christ is our life, and the Holy Spirit is given to us.

If then by the obedience of One we are constituted righteous, and if there, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound, "shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" "God forbid," says the apostle. Yet in his answer to this question he does not again place us under the law. That would be none other than to acknowledge the old man, the flesh, and when we are already lost to introduce afresh responsibility and condemnation; for the flesh is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. The answer of the Spirit refers rather to *the death of Christ*; all, however, that *He* has done is valid for us. The old man has been proved irremediably bad, and has in fact shown himself to be so in the *death* of Christ. I, who am crucified *with* Him, find it impossible now to recognize the same man who put Christ to death. I am come to Christ, because the man (I myself in my old condition) was such, and because I have now received a new life, Christ, risen from amongst the dead; but we must consider this more closely.

In having been baptized unto Christ Jesus (our true confession of faith), we were not baptized to a Christ whom the world has received, or who found a connecting-link with the first Adam. On the contrary, the world, man, has absolutely and wholly rejected Him, and driven Him away from the earth; and thus it is evident, as has been already said, that a union between God and man as a child of Adam was perfectly impossible. So God has begun afresh; we are born *again*. Christ, God be praised, as the rejected One, has accomplished the work of redemption; He has acquired

justification, forgiveness, and glory for those who believe on Him. But He is the *second* Man, and in Him man finds himself in an entirely new standing before God as well as in an entirely new condition. A *risen* Christ is our life, a *risen* Christ is our righteousness; the *old* man is for ever condemned. He who possesses Christ as his life shares in all this, because he has part in His death and resurrection. In Romans the first part only is developed—we are dead with Him, have died with Him. He is indeed presented as our life; but our resurrection with Him is not treated of, because the Holy Spirit here looks at Christians as men living on the earth. Christ is dead and risen; we are baptized unto His death. We have part in His death, inasmuch as He is our life. He, who is my life, died, and He died *to sin*. I acknowledge Him alone as my “I,” and as this new “I” I reckon myself dead to the old “I.” According to this new life I am alive to God; but with regard to my old man I am dead with Christ. How can I live the life of the old man if as such I am dead? Therefore, buried with Christ by baptism unto death, it behoves us to walk in *newness* of life. If we share His position, as dead to sin, we shall also share in His resurrection. The apostle does not say that we *have* part in it, but that we *shall* have part in it. This resurrection-life will be perfected in the glory; but it expresses itself already in a new walk, just as the power of the life of Christ which was brought to light in His resurrection in a positive way was also truly manifested in His walk on earth. “Knowing this,” says the apostle, “that our old man is crucified with Him that the body of sin might be destroyed” (that is to say, that sin in us as a whole might be destroyed) “that henceforth we

should not serve sin" (v. 6); "for he that is dead is freed" (or justified) "from sin." But this requires closer explanation.

We must first bear in mind that the Christian has not to die to sin, but that he *is* dead, because he is crucified with Christ; and because he has now received Christ as his life, he reckons the old man dead. He is not only delivered from individual sins or lusts, but the old man as a *whole* is set aside, dead, and to be held for dead by faith which acts according to the new man. It is true that the nature of the old man is still present in us; and its absence from our being does not follow upon our being dead with Christ, but it does not *govern*—"that henceforth we should not serve sin." It is not necessary to have even *one* bad thought, although the nature which produces them still exists; but we in no wise *serve* this nature, not even in thought, when the new life and the power of the Holy Spirit are active in us. The Christian is freed, not because his sins are for ever pardoned, but *because he is dead to sin*, crucified with Christ. Dead with Christ he is *justified* from sin, precisely *because he is dead*; but he is also *alive* in Christ. It is not only true that sin has no longer dominion, but the Christian is also free to yield himself up; he possesses a new nature, a new holy life. But to whom will he now yield himself? To righteousness and to God. This yielding up of the soul is not the act of the *sinner*, as is very often falsely affirmed, but of the delivered soul. Being purified, justified, assured of the love and favour of God, and in possession of a conscience rendered perfect through the blood of Christ, because no sin can any more be reckoned to him, the Christian is free, in liberty of

heart before God. The same blow which rent the veil also removed all his sins. Through the rent veil the light of God beams now freely upon him, to show that his garments are white as snow. He is free from the *power* of sin, because Christ is his life, and crucified with Christ, and alive now through Him alone, he reckons himself dead as regards the flesh. He is free before God, and also freed from sin. In this liberty he yields himself to God.

Thus the new life, walking also with God, gains already something along the path. We have *fruits*, even before we reach the glory, and this fruit is holiness. Blessed fruit! Having been made partakers of the divine nature, we thereby grow also in *practical communion* with God, inasmuch as holiness grows in us. This growth does not annul the truth that the new nature which we have received in itself is perfect. We belong wholly and entirely to God, are bought with a price, separated from sin and the world. We belong to God, according to the value of the offering of Christ, according to the new nature and the power of the Holy Spirit. We already belong after the inward man to the new creation, although "we have this treasure in earthen vessels." We are in Christ, and in Him we are perfectly accepted. He is our righteousness, a righteousness which is fit for the glory; for He is in the glory according to this righteousness. But He is also *in us* as our life, and according to the power of the Spirit. This life in itself is perfect, and cannot sin; yet we must also have an object of holiness outside of us. Therefore the Holy Spirit takes what is in Christ and reveals it to us; yea, He reveals to us all that is up there where Christ is, and where the Father is also.

Thereby we grow objectively in that which is heavenly; we are weaned from the world, live in spirit in the heavenly places, enjoy the Father's love, and become thus practically holy.

We are sanctified according to the counsels of God the Father, through the offering of Christ by His blood; we are so, as to our being, because we possess a new nature, a new life; we are so through the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit, and we may add, through the word of God the sanctification of the Spirit is wrought in our being born of God. But we must, as has been said, have an object, and the spiritual nature, the life, which we have received is capable of enjoying this object, God Himself. By the word of God the Holy Spirit communicates to us the things that are holy and divine. We are first regenerated by the Word through faith, then we are nourished by the Word, and the heart is purified likewise by faith, and truly the one and the other through the revelation of Christ in the heart—"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. . . . And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." (John xvii.17-19.)

If we would be accurate, we could not say that the new man, the life which we have received from God, *is* sanctified; for the new life itself *is* holy, and inasmuch as we have received it, *we* are sanctified for God, therefore believers in the apostolic epistles are called saints. But holiness in us is relative; that is to say, it refers to God, because we cannot be independent. No doubt a true state is thereby produced in us; but we are not holy in independence; for it is sin for a creature to be independent, also it *cannot* actually be independent. Thus holiness in us is objective; this is an important

principle. All that the Holy Spirit has revealed to us—the love of the Father and of Christ, the holiness of God, the perfection of Christ, His Person which has been given to us and delivered up for us, His being glorified now in heaven—all this operates in us, and forms the heart, the thoughts, the inward and thereby also the outward man, according to the object on which we gaze. All that Christ has done and suffered has its part therein, not only because His walk and His ways are a pattern for us, but because they attract the heart to Him. The affections are occupied with Christ and His perfection, and He fills our hearts. That is sanctification; for this also fills the Father's heart. "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life." (John x. 17.) The Father values what Christ has done, and what He was in so doing, and it has been done for *us*. We have holy thoughts, because we love and value what He has done, and what He was. Thus the same mind is in us which was in Christ. It is one side of the Christian character.

But the power of sanctification is wrought above all by the contemplation of *the glory of Christ*. The heart is indeed nourished by all that He was down here; we eat His flesh and drink His blood, enjoy also the bread which came down from heaven; but what transforms us into His image (2 Cor. iii. 18; 1 John iii. 2, 3) is the glory in which He now dwells. Beholding this glory we are changed into the same image. The *glory* of Christ operates in us the energy of the life, whilst we count everything else for loss. The *life* and the *sufferings* of Christ attract the heart to Him. (See Phil. ii. iii.)

He has sanctified Himself for our sakes, so that we might be sanctified through the Word. Wondrous grace! wondrous union! This separates us from the

world, unites us with what is heavenly, and forms us into the image of the heavenly. The end is eternal life in this very glory, when our earthly vessel also has been transformed into the likeness of this glory.

With regard to holiness we further learn, in Hebrews xii. 10, that the object of God's *discipline* is to make us partakers in His holiness. In this passage we discover not only God's ceaseless care of us, but we also learn to understand the precious character of this holiness. We have deserved death as the mournful wages of sad work; eternal life, the gift of God, is become our part through Jesus Christ our Lord; and this is pure grace. Who, but God only, could otherwise give us life—eternal life, divine life? Christ Himself is this life, sent from the Father into the world, and here revealed in manhood. And now "he that hath the Son hath life;" "he that believeth on Him hath everlasting life." (John i. 1, 2; v. 12; John iii. 36.) Although the last verse of our chapter points more to the result in glory, because in the counsels of God life eternal signifies perfect conformity to Christ in glory, yet it is none the less given to us now as life, although we are not yet in the glory. It is important for us to remark that it is the gift of God. Through sin, death had acquired man for itself; life, eternal life, in which we are capable of having fellowship with God, must be given of God. This life is Christ Himself. (1 John i.) He is the life which was with the Father, and is come down here. In Him was life; he that hath the Son hath life, and this life will soon be fully manifested in the glory. That is the principle of the new standing. We are dead with Christ to the old standing, and Christ is become our life.

J. N. D.

THE BOOK OF EZRA.

INTRODUCTION.

THE book of Ezra marks an important epoch in God's dealings with His people Israel. Although seventy years had elapsed, it is yet the continuation of 2 Chronicles; for time does not count with the Jews when in exile from the land of promise. They had lost everything by their sins and apostacy, and God had sent Nebuchadnezzar to chastise them, to destroy His own house which His people had profaned and polluted, to carry them away captive to Babylon, and "to fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths." (2 Chron. xxxvi. 21.) Nothing could be sadder than the record of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the termination of the kingdom as entrusted in responsibility to the hands of man, except indeed the still more fearful accounts of the siege and capture of Jerusalem by Titus soon after the commencement of the Christian era. The long-suffering of God had been tested in every possible way. In His patient grace He had borne with the high-handed rebellion of His people; He had lingered with a yearning heart, like the Saviour when He was upon earth, over the city which was the expression of royal grace; He had sent to them by His messengers, "rising up betimes and sending; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling-place; but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy. Therefore

He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees," &c. The sword of His justice thus fell upon His guilty people; for their sins had exceeded those even of the Amorites whom God had driven out before them. (See 2 Kings xxi. 11.) God's throne on earth was henceforward transferred to Babylon, and the times of the Gentiles—which still continue, and will do so until Christ Himself shall establish His throne, the throne of His father David (see Luke i. 32, 33; xxi. 24)—commenced. Lo-Ammi (not my people) was in this way written upon the chosen race, and they entered upon the sorrowful experience of captivity and banishment under the judicial dealings of the hand of their God.

But now, when the book of Ezra begins, the seventy years of their exile, which had been foretold by Jeremiah, had been completed, and Ezra relates the actings of God in connection therewith for the accomplishment of His own sure and faithful word; and it is the character of these which explains the attitude of God towards His people during the times of the Gentiles, and also, to some extent, the peculiarity of this portion of the Scriptures, as well as Nehemiah and Esther. In these books God is no longer seen actively interposing in the affairs of His people, but He works, as it were, behind the scenes, and at the same time, recognizing the new order which He Himself has established, He uses the Gentile monarchs, into whose hands He had committed the sceptre of the earth, for the execution of His purposes. Bearing these principles in mind we shall be the better able to enter intelligently upon the study of this book. The book divides itself into two parts. The first six chapters give the account of the return of the captives who responded to the proclamation of Cyrus,

and of the building of the temple; the last four of the mission of Ezra himself.

CHAPTER I.

THERE are two things in this chapter—the proclamation of Cyrus, and the response to it on the part of the people, together with an account of the number of “the vessels of the house of the Lord which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods” (*v.* 7), and which Cyrus now restored to those of the captivity who were about to return to Jerusalem. The first verse¹ draws back the curtain, and reveals the source of the power which was acting through all the subsequent events of this book for the fulfilment of Jehovah’s purposes. It runs, “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he might make a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing,” &c.

Let us pause for a moment to point out how the Lord—whatever the outward appearances—holds the hearts of all men in His hands, and turneth them whithersoever He will; how He uses men of all degrees as the instruments of the counsels of His will. The very mention of Cyrus carries us a step further back. “Who,” says the prophet Isaiah, speaking in the name of Jehovah, “raised up the righteous man of the east, called him to His foot, gave the nations before him,” &c. (*Chap.* xli. 2.) And again, “That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.” (*Chap.* xliv. 28.)

This prophecy was uttered long before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and at least a hundred years before Jeremiah was called to his prophetic work, and thus shows that the eye and heart of God are perpetually upon His people, and upon their interests, and that the public events of the world, the rise and fall of monarchies, the advent of mighty conquerors, are but the instruments of His power, by which He works on through the governments of the world to fulfil His own purposes in relation to His earthly people. How calmly therefore the children of God may rest amid political confusions and strife! In this way God had designated by the mouth of Isaiah, two hundred years before the event narrated in our chapter, His chosen vessel for the restoration of His people, and for the erection of His house at Jerusalem. A century passed away, and Jeremiah prophesied during the closing days of the kingdom, alternately warning and beseeching his people—warning them of the certainty of the approaching judgments, and beseeching them to repent and to humble themselves before the God whose wrath they had provoked by their wickedness and folly. It was in the course of his work that he said, "This whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord," &c. (Jer. xxv. 11, 12.) Also, "For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." (Jer. xxix. 10.) First, then, Cyrus is designated long

years before he was born into this world, and after another period had elapsed Jeremiah, while announcing the approaching captivity of the people, proclaims the exact duration of their exile.

But there is yet another instrument, not appearing indeed in this chapter, whom God was pleased to associate with Himself in carrying out His purposes of grace and blessing towards His people. Turning to the book of Daniel we read, "In the first year of his reign" (that of Darius) "I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes, &c." (Daniel ix. 2, 3.) God had spoken the word concerning, and provided the instruments for, the restoration of His people; and yet what do we find? That one of the captives, whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away to Babylon, the prophet Daniel, had discovered, not by any special revelation, but by patient study of the writings of Jeremiah, that God had fixed the period of seventy years for "the desolations of Jerusalem." Thereon, grounding himself upon this infallible word, he gave himself to prayer and fasting, humbling himself before God, confessing the sins of his people, and making supplication for the fulfilment of his own word. "O Lord," he said, "according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. Now,

therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake." (*vv.* 16, 17.) Thus Daniel, identifying himself with the state of his people, and in communion with the mind of God, had the unspeakable privilege of becoming an intercessor for Israel, and for the fulfilment of the promises of God. His prayer was heard (*vv.* 21-27); and we thereby learn that God in His grace permits His people to enter into His own thoughts, and to be associated with Himself in the accomplishment of His counsels for His own glory.

All therefore was now ready; the preparatory work had all been accomplished. In accordance with Isaiah's prediction "the righteous man from the east" had been called to the sovereignty of the Gentiles; and it is through him that the appointed deliverance must come. The next action is therefore recorded—"the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia," and the following proclamation is the result:

"Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, besides the freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem." (*vv.* 2-4.)

Three things are here announced; viz., the commis-

sion which Cyrus himself had received as to the Lord's house; his royal permission to any of the Jews to return to Jerusalem for the purpose of building the temple; and lastly, his invitation to those Jews who should remain in his dominions, to have fellowship with those who should depart in freewill offerings towards the object they had in view.

The rest of the chapter is taken up with an account of the effect produced by the proclamation. We say "the effect of the proclamation," but the reader will not fail to notice that it was He who had stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, who "raised" the spirit of those who offered themselves for the holy work in prospect. Two or three particulars only need to be observed. It is of importance, first of all, to point out that the chief of the fathers who offered themselves for the work were of the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. There were also Levites, but they did not count as a tribe, for Levi had "no part in the inheritance with his brethren, the Lord is his inheritance," &c. (See Deut. x. 8, 9.) It is plain indeed from this and other scriptures that, though there may have been individuals from other tribes, there were but these two tribes restored. It was only therefore to Judah and Benjamin that Christ, when born into this world, was afterwards presented for acceptance; and owing to their having rejected Him, it is they, and they only, who will pass through the terrible trouble, "such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time; no, nor ever shall be," which will be consequent upon the advent and power of the Antichrist in Jerusalem. For the same reason, the ten tribes will not be collected and restored until after the appearing of the Lord for the salvation of the remnant in the land.

(See Zechariah xiv., Ezekiel xx. 33-44, xxxiv. chap., and Jeremiah xxxi. 6-14.)

In the next place, God wrought in the hearts of the neighbours of those who devoted themselves to the work of the Lord's house, for they "offered willingly," according to the terms of the proclamation, of their substance, helping them with vessels of silver, and gold, &c. Lastly, Cyrus himself showed his interest in the work, in evidence that his heart also had been touched by divine power, by restoring the vessels of the temple which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods (See Daniel v. 1-4); and these he numbered unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. (*vv.* 7-9.)

We have thus, in this chapter, all the signs of a genuine work of God. Concurrence of heart and object is produced in all concerned, whether in Cyrus, without whose permission the captives could not have returned; in the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, who were needed for the actual work of building; or in those who remained, who, by having fellowship with their brethren by their freewill offerings, contributed towards the necessary expenses. There were no preliminary meetings to arrange and to come to an agreement, but the union of heart and purpose was produced alone by the action of the Lord on the hearts of all alike. This distinguishes a divine from a human work, and is the sure proof of a real action of the Spirit of God. Every needed instrument comes therefore forward at the right moment, for the work is of God, and it must be accomplished.

The last three verses contain the number of the sacred vessels which Sheshbazzar received from Cyrus, and brought up from Babylon to Jerusalem. E. D.

FALLING AWAY.

VERSE 6. Well, the apostle says, if a person who has been brought under all this power of the Holy Ghost give it all up, "it is impossible to renew such an one to repentance, for he has crucified for himself the Son of God." What had the nation done? It had crucified the Son of God. What were the people doing? The same as their fathers did. If you give up Christianity, give up this heavenly Christ—and God says He has nothing else left—all God's resources have been employed without effect.

Why does he speak of it being impossible to renew them again to repentance? I believe because repentance is always produced in the soul by the effect of the testimony of the Spirit of God, and God had no further witness to give. When God sent His Son into this world, what did man do? Man spat upon Him and slew Him. What did God do? Did He draw the sword of judgment? No; He took Him up to heaven, and sent from heaven the Holy Ghost to say to man, "You would not have Him as an earthly Christ, now will you have Him as a heavenly Christ?" If man refuses this—rejects a heavenly Christ—God, as it were, declares that there is no other means of producing repentance towards God, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ. As another has said, "After having been the subject of this influence of the presence of the Holy Ghost, after having tasted the revelation thus made of the goodness of God, and experienced the proofs of His power, if any one then forsook Christ, there remained

no other means for restoring the soul, for leading it to repentance. The heavenly treasures were already expended; he had given them up as worthless; he had rejected the full revelation of grace and power, after having known it. What means could now be used? To return to Judaism, and the first principles of the doctrine of Christ in it, when the truth had been revealed, was impossible, and the new light had been known and rejected. In a case like this there was only the flesh; there was no new life. Thorns and briars were being produced as before. There was no real change in the man's state.

When once we have understood that this passage is a comparison of the power of the spiritual system with Judaism, and that it speaks of giving up the former, after having known it, its difficulty disappears. The possession of life is not supposed, nor is that question touched. The passage speaks not of life, but of the Holy Ghost as a power present in Christianity. To "taste the good word" is to have understood how precious that word is, and not the having been quickened by its means. Hence in speaking to the Jewish Christians he hopes better things, and things which accompany salvation, so that all these things could be there and no salvation then. Fruit there could not be. That supposes life. The apostle does not however apply what he says to the Hebrew Christians, for, however low their state might be, there had been fruits, proofs of *life*, which in itself no mere power is; and he continues his discourse by giving them encouragement and motives for perseverance.

It will be observed, then, that this passage is a comparison between that which was possessed before

and after Christ was glorified, the state and privileges of professors at these two periods, without any question as to personal conversion. When the power of the Holy Ghost was present, and there was the full revelation of grace, if any forsook the assembly, fell away from Christ, and turned back again, there was no means of renewing them to repentance. The inspired writer, therefore, would not again lay the foundation of former things with regard to Christ—things already grown old—but would go on for the profit of those who remained steadfast in the faith.”

W. T. P. W.

FRAGMENT.

QUICKNESS of moral perception depends on the maintenance of a Nazarite separation from all and everything that might cloud our souls. Take the sons of Aaron for example. They were commanded not to drink wine or strong drink when they went into the tabernacle of the congregation lest they should die, *and that they might put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, etc.* (Lev. x.) This is an abiding principle; and hence when a believer forgets his heavenly calling, and yields to the indulgence of earthly joys, is “drunk with wine” instead of being “filled with the Spirit,” it is impossible for him to discern between things that differ, or to perceive what is suitable, morally suitable, to God. No greater mistake can thus be made than to expect a right judgment upon moral questions from worldly Christians. They may be perfectly sincere and upright, and may at the same time desire to see the truth, but they have lost their spiritual discernment; and where this is the case truth will soon fail, and he that departeth from evil will be accounted mad.

SCRIPTURE JOTTINGS.

I.

LUKE v. 33; vi.

THE Lord had been displaying His works, which spoke of a new order in the midst of Israel—the old order; but Israel was unsuited as a vessel to hold the new wine. Hence in chap. vi. He infringes the *established order* of things by virtually setting aside the sabbath; for, like David of old, He is the rejected and neglected One. The sabbath was the sign of the covenant between God and Israel (Ezekiel xx. 12); but the Son of man in the counsels of God has everything put under Him, therefore He is Lord also of the sabbath. The old order could allow the One in whom goodness and grace were being manifested, and His disciples, to be poor and hungry; the latter were doing on account of hunger (Matt. xii. 1) what was allowed (Deut. xxiii. 25) after the wave-sheaf had been offered. (Lev. xxiii. 14.) A new piece could not be put upon the old garment, and therefore the old must give place to the new. Hence He asserts His title as Son of man over the sabbath. Then, in verse 6, &c., sovereign goodness asserts its own right to display itself, notwithstanding *their* thoughts, and to do good on the sabbath days. It cannot be restrained in its actings towards want and woe by the established order.

Consequently new vessels are chosen adapted to hold the new wine which was flowing forth; but first (v. 12) we see Him all night in prayer to God. Who can speak of what was breathed out into the ear of God from the

heart of the lowly, dependent Man, who Himself bare our griefs and carried our sorrows, and "when it was day" of the fresh actings in perfect communion with the heart and mind of God? We trace now some of these actings in choosing the twelve to link them in with the outflow of grace. He comes down and stands with them in the plain or plateau, and a great multitude came round to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases. Then the new wine flows out. "The whole multitude sought to touch Him: *for virtue went out of Him.*" How one lingers over such a moment, drinking of the new wine which gladdens the heart as we witness the exquisite tenderness of grace! Virtue went out of Him and healed them all. What of hunger now, as those eyes are lifted up upon His disciples, and "Blessed, blessed," comes from His lips and bespeaks their portion? Poor and hungry, sorrowful and rejected, they might be; but blessed in His company. Blessed above prophets and kings who had been before them, but had never witnessed what greeted now their sight. (Chap. x. 23, 24.)

As we linger on such a scene, it may be profitable in our own day to take heed to the tendency there is to revert to that which is ready to vanish away. "No man when he hath drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better." Laodicea is rich and full now. It has reverted to the old order, and got down into the earth, and it excludes Christ. Ignorant of its true condition, it knows not its loss in Christ being outside. In Philadelphia, on the contrary, there is rejection by that which claims to be the established order; but identification with Christ, and a part in that order which has its sphere in the city and temple of my God,

II.

LUKE xxiv.

How little do we as saints realize that a new power has already entered this world of death! Man has a vague thought of resurrection at a future day. *We* too may often speak of it as a doctrine, but there is more—that power has been actually manifested here.

We are well acquainted with another power working all around us—the power of death. It is a power dreaded by man, but familiar to him; it oftentimes compels his attention. The flowers and wreaths that are strewn upon the bier and the grave are tokens of the attention which death receives. It is only knowledge of the new power which can divert our attention; but we are often as really ignorant as the poor affectionate women who went with their spices and ointment to the sepulchre. In chapter xxiii. 55, 56, we see them occupied with death—death in no ordinary form, but still with death—“They beheld the sepulchre, and how His body was laid.” Then they return and prepare spices and ointments; but the rest of the sabbath-day prevents their doing what would have been wholly out of character. God had ordered that the Lord should not be anointed for His burial in the tomb, but in the house at Bethany, where the presence of Lazarus attested the power of resurrection, and where the odour of the ointment which Mary poured on Him who is the resurrection and the life filled the house.

These dear women are still occupied with the adverse power as they go early in the morning of the first day of the week to the sepulchre. There they find that this new power had been in exercise—the stone is rolled

away, and they find not the body of the Lord Jesus. But they are not yet acquainted with it; on the contrary, "they were much perplexed thereabout." And surely we may ask ourselves whether, in the midst of the perplexity caused by the adverse power working here, we know what it is to have confidence in the God of resurrection. How could the power of death hold "the living One"? And yet these devoted women were seeking the living One among the dead. They need not have been ignorant; for the angels remind them of the words He had spoken in Galilee—not when dangers were thickening round Him in Jerusalem; but in the moment when Peter made confession to His person, "about an eight days" before He went up the holy mount, and was there greeted from the excellent glory by the Father's voice—"The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." They remember His words, and retrace their steps from the sepulchre to tell the tidings to the eleven and the rest. With what unbelief are they received? "Their words seemed to them as idle tales;" for not yet were they conscious of the power that had already wrought in this scene of death. There is a strange unbelief in man's heart, familiarized with his own lot, as to the working of the God of resurrection; and yet, without rising up in thought to the counsels of God secured therein, how fruitful has it already been to us. It has given back Jesus to us, a living, blessed Man, as the disciples had known Him in the days of His flesh—in resurrection life, it is true; but the same Jesus, no more to die. This is portrayed to us in what follows. Two are going to Emmaus, talking together of all that had

happened, when "Jesus drew nigh, and went with them." As at the beginning of this gospel it was said to the shepherds, "To you is born this day . . . a Saviour"—and the sign to them was "a babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger,"

"Once cradled in a manger,
That Thou mightst with us be"—

so at the close of the narrative He whom wicked hands had taken from those sorrowing disciples is given back to them by resurrection power. He walks and talks with the downcast travellers until their hearts burn within them, though as yet they know Him not; for questionings had still hold of their minds. A vision of angels had been seen, *who said that He was alive*. Had these two believed the report, it would have detained them at Jerusalem in the attitude of expectation. As it is, another motive leads them elsewhere. What tenderness of love that drew near and went with them! He has to call them senseless and unbelieving; and we may take His words home to our own hearts when we fail to comprehend in any way the pathway He has trodden. As in Galilee, so now, He has to speak of the *necessity* of His sufferings. "Must not Christ suffer these things, and enter into His glory?" But He tarries on the way, ere He enters into glory, to walk and talk and eat and drink with them after His resurrection. The same Jesus, known to them in the familiar act of breaking bread. What a power has already entered this scene! What fresh companionship with Jesus did it give, though of a new order! What a pledge we have of what is to be enjoyed for ever with Himself. May He interpret it to our hearts.

T. H. R.

GLEANINGS.

I.

THERE is nothing we meet with more commonly than two Christians forming diverse judgments about the same thing. Is it *man's* mind looking at the thing, or God's? Instead of being very ready to give an opinion, first see whether you are with the Lord about it. Be in a right state, and then you will see His mind. When God wants to tell you anything, He must put you where there is nothing to interfere with His communications; He cannot communicate where there is interference with His dealings.

J. B. S.

II.

Do we really believe in God being thoroughly competent and glad to make us happy, so that we can say, I have a *full cup*, and nothing needed to it? He has in His hand everything to contribute to my happiness, and if my heart is going out after something He has not *given* me, then I must go to the world for it. The soul that is not satisfied with God's competency to make it happy is turning to the world for this and that, and is not happy after all.

J. B.

III.

We can accept a previous revelation better than the present; we can accept a truth in the past better than one for the present time—the Lord's prayer, for example, because there is less exercise of faith, less demand for divine power, in going back to a thing that is past. If you are not right you are rejoicing in things that are past, and not in Christ's present things.

J. B. S.

IV.

When Christ begins with you, He will never leave off till He has you with Himself in heaven; it must be *everything* or *nothing*. He does it according to His own heart, and are you to dictate to Christ as to how *much* He shall bless you? Let Christ have His way with you. Why do we miss blessing? Is it possible to miss blessing? Yes, by not allowing the Lord Jesus to have His own perfect way with you. He wants to bless you, but there must be rest and quietness and subjection on your side. All the resources of Christ are then placed at your disposal.

E. P. C.

IS THERE A MERCY-SEAT FOR BELIEVERS?

IN hymns and prayers it is very common to meet with the idea of the mercy-seat as being the resource and retreat of the children of God in the midst of their trials and sorrows. The question therefore is whether this is a scriptural thought. Twice only, as far as we remember, is the expression found in the New Testament; viz., in Romans iii. 25 (propitiation in the English version, but really mercy-seat), and in Hebrews ix. 5. In the latter it is only mentioned as a part of the sacred furniture of the holiest; and hence it is to the former of these two passages that reference must be made. Now a moment's glance at the context shows that in Romans it is the sinner, and not the believer, who is in view. "All have sinned," says the apostle, "and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God has set forth a mercy-seat

through faith in His blood," etc. That is, all having been declared to be sinners, and lost and helpless on the ground of works, God justifies freely by His grace on the ground of the work of Christ. And with this object He sets forth His mercy-seat—no longer concealed, as in the tabernacle, behind the veil—Christ; and when the sinner approaches through faith, believing God's testimony to the efficacy of the blood of Christ, God's righteousness is declared in that He is just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Here then it is undoubtedly the sinner that approaches the mercy-seat; and, to the glory of God's unbounded grace, he finds, when he thus draws near, that through the value of the blood sprinkled there, as it were, before the eye of God, his sins are for ever put away. And we remind the reader that this is really the only passage that speaks of the mercy-seat as a place of approach.

Quite true, it may be replied; but the fact remains that Aaron every year went into the holy of holies on the day of atonement, and does not this justify our use of the expression? But why did Aaron continually appear before the mercy-seat? It was, as Hebrews x. teaches, because it was not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins. Inasmuch therefore as Christ by one offering has perfected for ever them that are sanctified, the need of the mercy-seat is gone. What then remains for the believer? It is the **THRONE OF GRACE**, to which we are exhorted to come boldly, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

E. D.

MEDITATIONS ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

CHAPTER VII.

THE apostle treats a new question in this chapter: What is the effect of the law in relation to our new position? The principle is simple. We are dead with Christ; again, a *law* has dominion over a man only so long as he *liveth*. When a murderer is condemned to death, and suffers the judicial sentence of death, the judge can do nothing more with him. Now we are dead; yet if it were only by the law that we were put to death, we should be not only dead but also condemned. But now we are dead *with Christ*, and He has borne for us the condemnation due to sin. Thus we are dead, and the law, therefore, exercises no more authority over us. Christ has stepped into the place of judgment. Instead of a law which forbade sins and lusts, and must of necessity condemn us (because the flesh, to which the law addressed its claims, was not subject to it, neither indeed could be), we possess in Christ a new life; whilst by faith we reckon the flesh, which is subject to sin, dead. The apostle makes use of marriage as the example; death dissolves the tie between husband and wife. So we are dead with respect to the law, and we are bound to another Husband; namely, to the risen Christ. The figure is employed here in the inverse sense. Not the *law*, but *we*, as having had our life in the flesh, are dead. This is the *doctrine*. In what follows the apostle speaks of *experience*. This in no wise annuls the important principle, but rather confirms the deliverance of the soul from the law through being dead with Christ,

who is now become our new life. According to the figure of marriage employed by the apostle, we are united as by marriage to Christ, and thereby are brought into an entirely new position—that of relationship. Therefore it says, “When we *were* in the flesh.” To be “in the flesh” means to stand on the ground or in the position of the first Adam before God, and to be responsible to Him according to this position. It is a question here, not of *guilt*, but of the deliverance of the soul from the *yoke of sin*. When man is without law, and seeking nothing but pleasure, the conscience can indeed be awakened some time, but the power of sin is not felt. He swims with the stream, and is not aware that he is under the dominion of sin. When one is converted one is first occupied with guilt, the burden of sins. Even when one has learnt to know the forgiveness of sins, and to believe that one is a child of God, the form of experience may indeed change, because it is no longer a question of justification; but the soul is none the less troubled so long as, in the history of its experience, it is undelivered from the power of indwelling sin. The question ever afresh arises, “How can God accept me, or how can He delight in me, when sin, which I cannot overcome, is still present?” As long as one does not know forgiveness one asks, “How can I obtain forgiveness?” When one has found it, the question still remains, “What *am* I before God? How can such an one as I be accepted? Have I really not deceived myself?” In a word, the eye is solely directed to that which we are in ourselves before God. We see that sin is still there, and yet a Christian ought to obtain the victory over sin. Such an one is, in fact, or as to the state of his spirit, in his mind, still in the flesh,

We have already remarked that the first four verses speak of *standing*. The fifth and sixth verses lead us on to *experience*. We were in the flesh united as by marriage to the law. This gave neither life, strength, nor confidence in God; it forbade sins, and imputed them to me. Not only that, but it gave occasion for sin in the flesh to work so as to bring forth fruit unto death. In forbidding sins and lusts it brought them before the heart. If a heap of money lay on the table, and someone said to me, "You must take none of it," immediately the desire to do so is awakened in me. Or if I say, "I have something here in this drawer, but no one must know what it is," instantly each one, great and small, feels a desire to open it. The passions of sins are absolutely not *of* the law, but *through* the law. It supposes, however, the existence of the flesh, and that we do not possess the strength of Christ. But now (in Christ) we are delivered from the law, being dead to that wherein we were held. We were in the flesh under the yoke of the law; the flesh was the source of sins, and now for faith it is dead, so that we serve in newness of spirit. The death of the flesh, of the old man, forms the basis for the transition from servitude in the flesh to liberty in the Spirit. At the same time this death stands in connection with redemption.

But how can this end be obtained? This is quite another thing from desiring it. The doctrine is presented very clearly and simply in the word of God—that there are many who, according to this doctrine, know that the Christian is dead with Christ, and even raised with Him; who also believe that they are dead with Him, because the word of God plainly declares it; who do not doubt that they are children of God, and that such

a position belongs to them as children of God, and who, in spite of all this, are not delivered. There are even upright souls, who, not walking as they would like to walk, begin to doubt, and to ask themselves if they are not hypocrites, and if they have not deceived themselves. They believe, and with reason, that God would fain see something other in them than what He sees. They make everything depend on what they are in themselves before God. But that is law, and not grace. The answer to the question, how the condition of liberty can be reached, is developed from verse 7.

In order to be truly delivered, one must learn, and that experimentally, that one is taken captive by the power of sin, and that one has no strength to deliver oneself, even when one earnestly desires to be delivered. To this end God makes use of the law, and the desire of the new man to be delivered from the yoke of sin, which he hates. Thus the Christian learns, not that he has sinned—this is not here the object in view—but that whilst he would gladly attain to holiness, a principle of sin in the flesh is active in him. The law teaches him that God cannot permit this; his renewed mind teaches him that God cannot allow it; he himself also does not desire it. And yet this principle of sin exists, powerfully active, too strong for him to be able to free himself from it.

Therefore the law has not only established with divine authority the duties relative to all circumstances of mankind, but has also added, "Thou shalt not covet." This is a touchstone for man, and clearly shows his *state*, even when he has not outwardly sinned, even when through conversion his will is directed to holiness. This holiness after which he strives he cannot attain. When he was

without law, his conscience did not feel the judge's sentence of death, if he had not sinned against its voice. Formerly he lived quietly, without carrying about with him the sense of condemnation. But the law came, and pronounced condemnation on the coveting. Experience teaches him that covetousness exists in the heart, and now conscience feels the sentence of condemnation; lusts even are awakened, and all comes to light. Conscience feels the judicial sentence. One would like to do good, but one finds that evil is continually present.

The law says, "This do and thou shalt live." The converted man, over whose conscience the law exercises its power, regards it as the law of God. The fear of God is in his heart, and he would fain do what the law saith. We speak here of the state of one who is converted, not of a delivered soul. Since the law promised life to the one who kept it, it was also given for life; but since the flesh is not subject to the law, it proves itself in reality for man to be unto death. This is the experience of an upright converted soul. It is well to remark here the difference between a natural man who has only a conscience, and the state of a man as here presented to us. The conscience distinguishes between evil and good. God has taken care that man, after becoming a sinner, should enter the world possessed of a conscience. It judges according to its nature what is evil; nevertheless man *does* evil. A heathen, whose will is not changed, might say, "I approve indeed what is better, but I *desire* not what is good, and follow what is evil." But it is not thus with the man of whom the apostle here speaks. His *will* is renewed; he delights in the law of God. This is the mind of Christ Himself, and proves that the man in whom this mind is found is converted, and in the

bottom of his heart has received a new life. Conscience in the unconverted man leads him to recognize what is good; but the will of the flesh remains ever the same. He just lives in the flesh, has indeed a conscience, but no new will. *The will*, on the contrary, is not lacking in the man described in Romans vii., but the *power* to do what he would. It is the state of a soul which desires good which is in question here.

In verse 13 the apostle goes on to describe the effect of the law on the experience of the soul who also desires what is good. In the previous verse it is acknowledged that the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. The question now naturally arises, "Was then that which is good made death unto me?" In nowise. But *sin* worked death *by* that which is good (the law) in order that sin might be fully manifested, might assume its true character, and become exceeding sinful in that it has made use of what is good to produce death. The evil does not manifest itself only as evil by and for itself, but also as *disobedience*, because it is forbidden, and thus through the commandment becomes exceeding sinful. Sin in man has a strong will; he *will* do what is evil even when God has forbidden it. If my child goes to play instead of doing his tasks, it is a bad habit; but if I forbid him to run out, and he still goes on with this bad habit, it is in addition disobedience. By the commandment sin is become exceeding sinful. It shows that in me there are not only evil lusts, but that self-will which commits the evil, in spite of God's commands, is also there; God and His word are despised.

But we learn yet more from the law; namely, our weakness, even when we *would* do good. The converted

but undelivered man does not succeed in doing what he would like to ; he lacks the strength. He finds that he is carnal, sold under sin ; that is to say, a slave to it. He knows that the law is spiritual ; but he is in the flesh, carnal, under the yoke of sin, to which he is sold as a slave. Conscience is active according to the measure in which he knows the will of God in the law, and he sees indeed in the law not only external precepts, but something which judges the springs of evil in the heart. One may be outwardly blameless ; Saul and many others were ; but they were thereby full of self-righteousness. But the law in forbidding *lust* might as well forbid us to be men ; therefore God has added the commandment, "Thou shalt not covet."

It is not here then a question of what I have *done*, but of what I *am*, and there I first discover that in me dwelleth no good thing. I would do good, but I do it not, I am under the yoke of sin in the flesh. I acknowledge that the law is good ; I hate sin, and yet I do it. But what I hate, I am not myself ; yea, I hate it. Thus, taught of God, I learn to distinguish between myself and what I do. As the apostle says, "Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." Yet this is not deliverance ; this requires strength. But it is none the less a very important comfort by the way to have not only learnt that in me dwells no good thing, but also to distinguish between me and sin which dwelleth in me. I delight in the law of God after the inward man ; the conscience is in activity, and the will is brought into subjection. What is still lacking is strength, and this is not possessed because redemption is not fully known. One learns experimentally, not only that one does not do good, but

also that one *cannot* do it; the yoke of sin is ever there. And this is precisely what one has to learn; namely, that one has "no strength" to do the will of God.

Up to this then we have spoken of three truths which have to be learnt experimentally :

1. In the flesh dwelleth no good thing.

2. We have to distinguish between ourselves, who desire what is good, and sin which dwelleth in us.

3. There is no strength in us to overcome sin in the flesh as long as we are not delivered; we shall the rather be overcome by it.

We cannot then deliver ourselves; on the contrary, we must be delivered; and the soul has to be brought to the knowledge of this. "Who shall deliver me?" is the expression springing from the consciousness that we cannot do it ourselves; we look around for another to do it. This is what we have to learn, not our guilt, but our weakness—our utter powerlessness, our dependence on God. However, we have here several things to consider.

Only one who has been in this condition, and has come out of it, can describe it. It is impossible for a man who has fallen into a bog quietly to describe his situation as long as he is in it. He only feels that he is sinking and perishing, so that he can do nought else but cry out for help. But after he is saved, he can calmly describe it all. One who has never been in such a situation might perhaps say to him, "Why did you not go on until you found a firm footing?" "Indeed," says the other, "that is easily said; but when I lifted up one foot in the bog, the other sank in all the deeper." This, then, is the condition of the soul in Romans vii., described, it is true, by a Christian who has himself been in it, but is now delivered. I say, "by a Christian;" for

when the apostle says "we know" (v. 14), it is Christian *knowledge*. But *experience* is the consciousness of a person individually. Thus, when he says "*I am*," it is experience and not doctrine. The experiences communicated to us here are legal throughout. The person concerned consents to the *law* that it is good; yea, he delights in the *law*. The conscience and the will are sincere as to divine things; but both have the law as object and measure. We do not hear a word of Christ or of the Spirit; the law is the only object before the soul. But in verse 25 true deliverance is obtained, and the Christian, *delivered*, thanks God. Conflict, it is true, ever goes on; we find this in Gal. v. 16-18. If, however, we are led of the *Spirit* we are not under the law; that is to say, not in the state described in Romans vii.

J. N. D.

"THE LIGHT SHINETH IN DARKNESS."

He came, the Son of God,
 Into a cruel, heartless world,
 To tell the story, then untold,
 Of God's unfathomed love.

He came, and men stood by
 To hurl upon Him dire contempt,
 To spurn the truth that God had sent,
 And listen to a lie.

He came, the Christ of God,
 And shouting multitudes reviled;
 He heeded not their tumults wild,
 His feet with peace were shod.

He came, and walked apart
 Midst scenes of wickedness and woe,
 To teach some empty hearts to know
 The fulness of God's heart.

He came, and in the light
Of God's own face, He trod this scene,
To leave behind, where He had been,
A line of heavenly light.

Oh, wondrous tale of love !
For us He bore the wrath of God,
For us He passed through death's dark flood—
The deepest proof of love.

And, risen from the dead,
He made a home for us on high ;
Unveiled the glory to our eye, ⁸³
Which lights the path we tread.

And still He waits up there,
To gather in the vile, the lost ;
To bring them home, though tempest-tossed,
Where love casts out all fear.

He lives, and so we live,
To find His joy fulfilled in us ;
To learn His path of shame and loss,
Which He alone can give.

But, oh, what untold joy,
That He, whom men despise and scorn,
Will usher in an endless morn
With glory on His brow !

The bright and morning star
Which gilds with light our pathway here,
Will be outshone by daylight there,
Which clouds can never mar.

And walking in the light
Of God's own face for evermore,
We'll praise, and worship, and adore
The Son of God's delight.

C. A. W.

THE BOOK OF EZRA.

CHAPTER II.

WE have in this chapter a register of "the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city." (v. 1.) There are several interesting particulars to be noticed in the record; and the first is, that the fact of its existence shows how precious to God was the response which His grace had produced in the hearts of His people, however feebly they may have entered into His thoughts in regard to His house. On this account He has caused this list to be preserved, in evidence that He beholds with joy the smallest fruits of His Spirit's work, and that the very names of His people are known and proclaimed as an encouragement to all to walk in His ways, to be identified with His interests, and to maintain fidelity in times of corruption and apostasy. (Compare Luke xii. 8 and Rev. iii. 5.) In verse 2 the names of the leaders are given, and then the people are classified according to their family descent.

Examining this catalogue a little more closely, a four-fold division will be found. Down to the end of verse 42, those who were undoubtedly of Israel, of Judah, Benjamin, or of Levi (among the last both singers and porters), are described. Then follow two other classes, the Nethinims, and the servants of Solomon, concerning whom a few words will be necessary. (1) The Nethinims. (vv. 43-53.) The question is raised whether

these were of Jewish descent. The word would seem to mean "those that are given;" and it has been concluded that they, from the place in which their names occur in the chapter (see also 1 Chron. ix. 2), were of another race, but had been given originally to the Levites for their service, even as the Levites—only these by divine command, and in the place of the firstborn of Israel (see Num. viii.)—had been given to Aaron for the Lord's service in His tabernacle. And traces of such are found in two scriptures. In Numbers we read, respecting the spoil taken from the Midianites, "Of the children of Israel's half, Moses took one portion of fifty, both of man and beast, and gave them unto the Levites, which kept the charge of the tabernacle of the Lord; as the Lord commanded Moses." (Chap. xxxi. 47.) We also find that Joshua said to the Gibeonites, "There shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God." (Joshua ix. 23.) It is here, therefore, that we probably find the origin of the Nethinim, those who were spared from the just judgment of God; and if reduced to servile bondage, it was bondage in His mercy in connection with His house, whereby the very curse that rested on them (see Joshua ix. 23) was turned into a blessing. For what do we find? That instead of being destroyed with the sword of the Lord's host, they were rescued, and now, after the lapse of centuries, they are found in honourable association with the Lord's people, and with a heart too for the Lord's house, inasmuch as they returned from Babylon with their fellow-captives at this special moment. They are surely thus no mean foreshadowing of the objects of grace even in this dispensation. (2) Solomon's servants. Of these

the information is less distinct. But we read that Solomon levied "a tribute of bond-service unto this day" of the children of the Amorites, &c., that were left in the land, whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy (1 Kings ix. 19-21); and it might have been the descendants of these who received the designation of "Solomon's servants." However this might have been, the lesson already drawn is again significant, that the least connection with the Lord's people and the Lord's things becomes a means of blessing—if not always, as it surely does not, of spiritual, yet almost ever of temporal blessing, even though it may be sometimes limited, through sin and unbelief, to length of days and earthly comfort. But with "the servants of Solomon," as with the Nethinim, there must have been more than this; for through grace they had returned, of their own desire, to aid in building the house of God at Jerusalem. The number of these two classes was three hundred and ninety-two.

We have, in the next place, two other classes occupying a peculiar and, in a sense, a most mournful position. There were some—the children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred fifty and two—who could not show their father's house and their seed, whether they were of Israel; and besides these, of the children of the priests, the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai, &c.—these sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood. (*vv.* 59-62.)

In the land of their exile the same care as to title and qualification had not been exercised. Babylon represents the corruption to which God's people are in

bondage through their sins, and hence the period of their captivity was a time of carelessness, a time indeed when they were suffering under the hand of their God, but still a time of confusion and disorder; and necessarily so, inasmuch as they were without the temple, without sacrifices, and without Jehovah's presence. But now that, through the mercy of their God, there had been a recovery—a partial recovery, it is true, but one that contained within itself a distinct action of the Spirit of God—and now that Jehovah's house was once more to become their centre, they were properly exercised concerning the title of all who had returned from Babylon. If any could not show their genealogy they had no claim to take part in the work to which they had been called; and in the case of the priests the consequence was still more grave. These—if they could not find their register—were, as polluted, put from the priesthood. They were not told that they were not priests; the ground taken was that their claim was not proved. It might be at a future time; and hence the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim. When that time arrived the priest, who should be once more endowed with divine intelligence and discernment through the light and perfection of God (Urim and Thummin), might adjudge them to be truly priests; but meanwhile their claim was forfeited. Grace could restore what was lost under law; only for this they must patiently wait.

A precisely similar thing in principle has been seen during this century. It is not too much to say that, at its commencement, the Church of God in this land was

completely under the domination of the world-power. The life of God's people was sustained through the ministry of a few faithful men here and there, and through the study of the word of God; but the Church as a whole was enslaved, and had been enslaved, in Babylonish captivity. Soon after a recovery took place. God wrought in the hearts of many in different places, producing great exercises of soul; and a movement was initiated which resulted in the deliverance of numbers in many parts of the country. The charter of their deliverance from captivity was the word of God. To it they turned day and night, and there they found both light and life. By it they judged themselves and their ways, by it they discovered the true character of their past bondage, and from it they obtained also guidance for the future. Listening to its teachings, they once again spread the Lord's table in all its simplicity. They learned that the Holy Ghost dwelt in the house of God, and that the Lord had promised to come quickly to receive His people to Himself. Thereon they were immediately confronted with the difficulty found in this chapter—the difficulty of title and qualification to break bread at the Lord's table. In the past every good citizen might do so, and all such were often exhorted to come. No one who *claimed* to be a Christian was ever denied, while very many, whose lives contradicted their profession, were received without question. Could such practices be continued? Then the answer was found, that only such as could "shew their father's house," or could find "their register," had the scriptural qualification for a place at the table of the Lord. In other words, unless we have peace with God, unless we know that

we are children of God through the possession of the Spirit of adoption, and can thus show our Father's house; and trace our genealogy, we have not the divine title required. Profession is not enough. In a day like this, a day of restoration from captivity, there must be the ability to verify our profession from the sure word of God; for, as the apostle says, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." (1 Cor. x. 16, 17.)

But it is objected: Do you not constitute yourselves judges of others? By no means. As indeed the governor said in effect to the priests in this chapter, who were put away, You may be really priests, only you cannot produce your title. It must be left over therefore until a priest arises with the Urim and Thummim, one who can judge according to God. So now the burden of proof lies upon the one who desires to come to the Lord's table, and to be thus identified with His people. If he fail to produce it, he is not excluded by those who have to do with him, but by his inability to declare his genealogy; and if he be really a member of the body of Christ, his title, albeit all is of grace, will be fully acknowledged in a future day by the Lord Himself. It is needful that this scriptural principle should be both understood and enforced.

The question of the priests goes still further. These, as we have seen, were put out from their office, the functions of which were to minister before the Lord, and to teach the people (see Exodus xxviii.; Leviticus

x. 9-11; Deut. x. 8; Malachi ii. 5-7); and they were also forbidden, owing to their inability to find their register, to eat of the holy things. (Compare on this subject Leviticus xxii. 1-16.) What a solemn commentary upon the practices that have obtained for centuries in Christendom! Forgetful or ignorant of the truth that all true believers, and no other, are priests (1 Peter ii.), they have devised a way of making priests—of filling their “holy” offices by a human ordination. And such, when thus appointed, arrogate to themselves the exclusive right of approach to God, as well as that of the interpretation of the Scriptures. It is a small thing to say that these practices are a denial of Christianity—they are worse; for they set aside the efficacy of the work of Christ, deny His authority, as well as ignore the sovereign action of the Holy Ghost. God alone makes priests, and every one who is washed with water (born again) is brought under the value of the one sacrifice of Christ, is sprinkled with His precious blood, as also with the anointing oil (the unction of the Holy Spirit), is set apart by Him for this office. (Read Exodus xxix.; Hebrews x.) Such, and such alone, can find their register among those that are reckoned by genealogy, “and have liberty of access into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh” (Heb. x. 19, 20); where, by the grace of God, they are permitted to feast on the holy things—the various aspects of Christ as symbolized by these—in communion with God in His own presence.

The number of the whole congregation, we are now told, was forty and two thousand three hundred and sixty.

Besides these were their servants and maids, amounting to seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven; and among them two hundred singing men and singing women. There were also seven hundred thirty and six horses, two hundred forty and five mules, four hundred thirty and five camels, and six thousand seven hundred and twenty asses. (Verses 65-67.)

Such was the large company or caravan that travelled from Babylon to Judah and Jerusalem, with their hearts set upon the holy enterprise to which they had been divinely called. But a narrower inspection of the elements of which this multitude was composed will discover the sure precursors of decline and decay. What had these pilgrims, for example, to do with singing men and singing women? Their land was desolate, their sanctuary had been consumed with fire, and was lying waste, and they themselves were but a feeble remnant just emancipated from the yoke of captivity. Surely it was no time for mirth and song! (Compare Psalm cxxxvii.) Alas! every action of the Spirit of God, producing a revival in the hearts of His people, is speedily limited by man, and by his own thoughts and desires. Even the first response to His mighty power gathers with those who are really under His influence those also who will corrupt the movement and ensure its outward failure. How remarkably this is exemplified in the book of Judges, and has been so in every age of the Church!

Arrived at their destination, we read that some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in its place. They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thou-

sand drams of gold, and five thousand pounds of silver, and one hundred priests' garments. (Verses 68, 69.)

It is interesting to notice the form of the statement—"When they came to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem," showing that the house, whatever its outward condition, and razed to the ground as it had been, still existed before the eye of God. Thus, though there were three different houses until the time of the Lord, it was always the same house in the mind of God. Haggai, on this account, says, as it should be rendered, "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former." (Chap. ii.) There is undoubtedly another reason for this form of words in Ezra. God would seem to have used the desolations of His sanctuary to touch the hearts of these chief of the fathers. When they came to Jehovah's house—when they saw, as it were, its condition—they were moved, and they "offered freely" of their substance; and, as the Spirit of God is careful to notice, thus setting the seal of His approval upon the act, "they gave after their ability." In this they are surely examples for all time for those of the Lord's people who have the privilege of ministering to the Lord, whether in having fellowship with his necessitous saints, or with the needs of His service.

The chapter closes with the statement, "So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities. (v. 70.) It is open to the spiritual reader to question whether this record—especially when read in the light of what took place afterward, as related in Haggai i.—is not symptomatic of the decay of their first energy, whether it

does not reveal the tendency to think of themselves and their own houses before the interests of the Lord's house. Solomon spent thirteen years in building his own house, while he occupied but seven upon the temple; and knowing what man is, it is not surprising if the restored remnant began by first minding their own things. But if so, the next chapter will show that the word of God was still energetic in their souls, to the praise of Him who had redeemed them from captivity, and associated them with Himself in the thoughts of His heart towards Jerusalem, and towards His temple.

E. D.

LIGHT, TESTIMONY, AND REST.

EXODUS XXV. 31-40; NUMBERS X. 1-3, 33.

I WANT to say a little, as the Lord may help me, on Light, Testimony, and Rest. The candlestick—light; the trumpet—testimony; the ark—rest.

One of the first proofs that a person is really saved, and consciously set for God in the world, is his knowledge of the fact that God has left him down here to be for Himself. After we were converted, why did not God at once take us home to heaven? One object was, that we might be a reproduction of Christ. In Phil. ii. 5 we read: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus;" and, chap. i. 21, "To me to live is Christ." Do I get up in the morning with the thought, There is one thing that I am left here for, that God may see in me Christ lived over again?

Perhaps a person may say, as to being a light-bearer, I have no desire to be one. If so, it would prove one of three things; either that the person was not con-

verted at all; else, was quickened but not delivered; or in a very bad condition of soul, really away from God. Well, I take it for granted that none of us are in either of these three conditions; but that we are all longing to be, in our little measure, light-bearers for God. If we are in a right condition of soul, we shall desire to be light-bearers; and if we are to be light-bearers, we must be put upon the wheel. You never saw a potter make a vessel without putting the clay on the wheel. If you are a vessel of honour, you must have been put on the wheel. I do not know your wheel, and you do not know mine; but we each know our own.

The candlestick was, first, of pure gold; for this the crucible was needed. Secondly, of beaten work—beaten into the shape of a lampstand with the hammer. The crucible is some severe, sharp, short, trial—separative. The object of the crucible is to make a vessel of *pure* gold. It does not add to or take from it. If a pound of pure gold be put into a red-hot furnace, it comes out two hours afterwards a pound of pure gold; it loses nothing. It is put into the crucible that what is not pure gold may be taken from it. We *are* gold, and are put into the crucible to separate us from the dross. The nearer we get to God, the more glad we shall be to be nothing but what is suited to God and to Christ; to be separated from everything, personally, domestically, commercially, and ecclesiastically, that would dim the gold; from anything that hinders our growth, advancement, and testimony for God and Christ in this world. The crucible is sharp, short, and separative. The object of the crucible is to separate and purify. The hammer is slow, sure, and formative. We find it in the history of the saints in

the Old and New Testament, and in our own. When Abraham offered up Isaac, it was the crucible for him—sharp, short, and separative. Just before, we read, Abraham planted a grove; but after he offered Isaac we never hear of the grove again. The taking away of Joseph from Jacob was the crucible for him, but it acted in a different manner; he needed the successive strokes of the hammer as well. The crucible did not do the work when Joseph went because Benjamin was slipped into his place; all the rest of his life Jacob had the successive strokes of the hammer, but who would have thought that his life would have had such a magnificent sunset! How splendidly he was formed by the successive strokes of the hammer!

The Lord did not command Moses to make a *mould* of a seven-branched candlestick, and to run the gold into it. No, it was to be hammered out of a solid block of pure gold; it was to be made of *beaten* work, and the character of the metal unmixed pure gold—"beaten work," not moulded, "of pure gold." Ah, beloved, we are not fit to be light-bearers for God if we shrink from the crucible and hammer! If we really want to be light-bearers for Him we shall welcome the crucible because it separates, and the hammer because it forms. If we saw that, we should see how wonderfully all the trials and difficulties that come on us are sent by God. In this day of trial, when there are difficulties around, when we dread the post coming in lest it should bring bad news, when we do not know what sorrow may come next, how wonderful to be able to say, "As for God, His way is *perfect*." We do not attain to this in a moment; there are four distinct stages to it. After all the exercises and discipline God has

passed you through, can you say, "As for God, His way is perfect"? I do not mean in a stoical way. I abhor stoicism from the depths of my heart. "Jesus wept." He was no stoic. Paul wept. I wish I could weep like Jesus and Paul. It would be a good thing if there were a few more tears shed in this hard day. Tenderness is what we want. Jesus set His face as a flint, yet was there ever such tenderness as His? It is not just stoically saying, "Oh, yes; as for God, His way is perfect!" that is human schooling. Can you really say, "As for God, His way is perfect"? People say they wish to be resigned, and talk about dying and being resigned. Is that the highest condition of soul a saint of God can reach to? There are four stages:

1. Resignation. That is the lowest.
2. Acquiescence. That is not the highest, but it is one above.
3. Justification. Being able to justify God.
4. To adore Him for all His dealings. That is the highest. One of the Latin Fathers wrote on the wall of his cell—

"I bow me to Thy will, my God,
And all Thy ways adore."

That was not resignation, acquiescence, or justification; it was adoration. Can you say, "I know my Father is doing the *best* thing for me"? He is doing the best for His own glory, and for my richest blessing. "As for God, His way is perfect." I may be crushed, bowed down, yet will I adore and worship Him.

Look at those poor men, with the blood clotted on their backs, in a damp, dirty, dingy prison cell, yet not a murmur, so above self that they can pray and then praise. "As for God, His way is perfect." (Ps. xviii.

30-32.) God says, "Now that you adore me for all my ways, I will come in for you." "It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect." My way is in exact correspondence with His way, and He goes on until the poor weak fingers are so strong that they can break the bow of steel. There is not a difficulty but I am superior to it. In the first epistle of Peter we find—

I. Trial from God.

II. Trial for unrighteousness.

III. Trial for righteousness.

IV. Trial for Christ.

V. Trial from the devil.

And all to make me a more efficient light-bearer for God in this world. It is exceedingly precious to know that God has the metal in His own hand. We see people putting heavy strokes where they should be light, and light where they should be heavy; few where there should be many, and many where there should be few. We are in divine hands, not in one another's. When God offered David three things, he said, "Let me fall into the hand of the Lord." He would rather be in the hands of God than of the devil or his enemies. We are in the Father's hands. "The Father Himself loveth you." He knows how long to keep His bit of gold in the crucible, and when to put it under the hammer. God knows how to touch us so that we welcome the crucible and the hammer, and adore God for both. "As for God, His way is perfect." That is God's way of making light-bearers.

"Make the two trumpets of silver." (Numb. x.) The candlestick was of gold. None of the exercises God passes us through are to make us gold. We *are* gold

(we are "the righteousness of God in Christ"), but it is because He loves us. It is remarkable that the candlestick was not only to be beaten-work of gold, but there were to be *seven* lamps, the perfect number. Here it is *two*—adequate testimony—the trumpets of silver. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." No one is fit to bear testimony unless conscious of redemption, that is why the trumpets were made of silver—the redemption money. A man does not know what it is to be resting in the benefits of redemption if he is groaning for deliverance. If he were delivered he would be rejoicing, standing on accomplished redemption. Do we know what it is to be "blessed with all spiritual blessings," the ceaseless objects of the Father's heart, to be in relation to the Father, to be at leisure from ourselves, light-bearers and testimony-givers for God in this world?

What are we waiting for? Only for the Bridegroom. What do we desire to be? Clear light-bearers and efficient testimony-givers for Christ. We often think of being gainers, but what a wonderful thing it is for Christ to be a gainer. If I live, He gains; if I die, I gain. It would be far better for me to get away from this surging scene of suffering and of sorrow, but if I stay Christ *gains*. The two trumpets were adequate testimony given on the ground of accomplished redemption. They were not to be moulded any more than the lamp-stand. It is of no use to think we can be distinct light-bearers or testimony-givers if we reject the crucible. I daresay you have heard how the silversmith refines his silver; he puts his beautiful piece of silver into the crucible, and sits watching it till he sees his own face reflected in it, and then he takes it off the

fire; another moment would spoil it. Then it cools down, and he puts it under the hammer. The two trumpets were for calling and setting forward. We find the twofold testimony in Col. i. 23, the trumpet of the gospel of the grace of God, the calling one; and, verse 24, not only the testimony of the gospel of the grace of God, but the gospel of the Church, the body of Christ. The moment a person can say, "I believe that Jesus died for me," you can blow another trumpet, and say, "Do you know that He is there in the glory for you?" It is a wonderful thing to be saved by Christ, but far more wonderful to be united to Him in heaven. We are not only saved from a depth which could not be deeper unless we had been in hell itself, but raised to a place which could not be higher without being higher than Christ. He not only died to save me, but He has gone on high, and sent the Holy Ghost down to unite me to Himself, so that I can say, what even the archangel cannot say, "I am one with Christ." How does He get testimony-givers? By passing us through the crucible, and putting us under the hammer. We all have our work to do; there is work for all, a mission for each. I cannot fill your place, nor you mine. His word to each one of us is, "Occupy till I come;" and He desires that we should be decided, distinct, habitual light-bearers and testimony-givers for Himself down here. If I see His object in separating and forming, I shall welcome both the crucible and the hammer.

"We cannot always trace the way
Where Thou, our gracious Lord, dost move,
Yet we can always surely say,
That God is love."

We may be laid low, made nothing of; we shall be

willing to be nothing that He may be produced and expressed, that He alone may be the gainer in this scene. Whether it is the crucible or the hammer, "all things work together for good." It is beautiful to see in Gideon's case how there was light and testimony. In Phil. ii. 14, 15, we have the lamp-stand and trumpet, and in other Scriptures we see how God connects the two things—all in love. "Love in all I see."

Numbers x. 33. Seven, marks perfection; two, adequate testimony; three, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. God owes His brightest glory to the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He furnished God with a fresh motive for loving Him by laying down His life. "Never man spake like this man" was once said; we can say, Never man loved like this man.

How little do we enter into all God owes, and all we owe to Christ's death. Are you looking for Him to-night? Death, the world's conversion, the revelation of antichrist, the restoration of the Jews, are never our hope—our only hope is the return of the Bridegroom. Did you get up this morning expecting Him? If you are allowed to retire to-night will you be expecting Him? *Then* there will be rest, and neither adversary nor enemy occurrent. No need of the crucible then, we shall be just like Him. No need of the hammer there. There will be no discipline, no exercise then, for the former things are passed away—that is what we wait for. We never could have had rest of conscience, rest of heart, or the rest of God but for the ark going the three days' journey. We are very near the last rest now. If we have the first rest, and have taken His yoke, and thus found the second, we shall be sure

when Christ comes to get the third. God grant that on our way to the rest which we are so shortly to enter into for ever we may be better light-bearers for the Lord Jesus Christ.

H. M. H.

"JUSTIFICATION OF LIFE."

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER.

"As to 'justification of life,' it is that justification we have as being alive in Christ; that is, it goes beyond mere forgiveness of sins as in the old man which are put away. It is the clearance of all imputation which we have as alive in Christ; but the passage gives us something more specific, it refers to verses 16 and 17.

"Verse 16 is of many offences to justification, which of itself goes further than clearing the conscience of sins. Verse 17 further adds that they who have received abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, will reign in life. This, while based on the clearing, brings us into the new place in life, and reigning in it. Hence we have 'justification of life.' 'By one offence towards all to condemnation.' 'By one complete righteousness towards all men to justification' (v. 18); but then 'in life,' a new life in Christ, not merely, that is, the old sins cleared away negatively, but in the new place by a work of Christ, which God had fully owned. He had finished the work which His Father had given Him to do, and was in virtue of it in a new place as Man in life—life (in us) and justification went together. I do not know if I have made myself plain. It does not go quite so far as the 'in Christ,' but it does identify *our* justification and a new *life* in Him."

J. N. D.

MEDITATIONS ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

CHAPTER VIII. (vv. 1-11.)

THIS deliverance stands in the closest connection with redemption, not so much with regard to forgiveness as with regard to our being dead with Christ. We have already seen that there are two capital points in redemption; namely, the forgiveness of sins, or justification; and deliverance—liberty before God, and liberty from the yoke of sin in the flesh. Now if we are dead with Christ, we are dead *to sin*, and are no longer *in the flesh* before God. Life in the flesh is no more our position, because Christ, after having *died*, is become our life. Sin in the flesh is judged, condemned—not forgiven—and that in the death of Christ on the cross. The power of the life of Christ is in me, is *my* life; yet not only that. Sin in the flesh, which was my torment, is already judged, only in another; so that there is no longer for me any condemnation on account of the flesh. Death has entered in where condemnation, the judgment of the flesh, had been exercised, and those who are in Christ Jesus are dead with Him, so that there is no more condemnation for them. What is true of Him is true of us; He is dead to sin, and the condemnation is passed. This is our condition with respect to sin in the flesh. If putting away of *sins* is clearly set forth in the first part of the epistle, the setting aside of *sin in the flesh*, and its condemnation, is here just as clearly presented; yea, for faith the flesh itself is set aside, since we are *dead*.

This condition is described in the three first verses of chapter viii. The Christian is in an entirely new position; he is in Christ. The grace of God has not only revealed itself in the fact that the sins of the old man are forgiven, but his *standing* also is an entirely new one; *we* are redeemed. It does not say, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those whose sins are forgiven," but "for those who are *in Christ Jesus*." This *standing* is the result of the work of Christ, of redemption. The Christian is delivered with Christ from the standing in the flesh because he is dead with Him, and has part in the life of a risen and glorified Christ. Thus he no longer stands before God as a child of Adam responsible in the flesh, but as one who has truly, by death, done with this standing, and who is alive in Christ. The flesh is considered as dead, condemned, as no longer in existence, but as out of sight in the death of Christ. The Christian is alive in Christ; he is no longer in the flesh. (Compare Gal. ii. 19, 20.)

The expression, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," in the second verse of our chapter, may appear strange to many of our readers. It means, I believe, that the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus works continually and without interruption, according to one and the same principle, in order that, since the flesh has been condemned in another, it should be dead in the believer. The believer is *in Christ* by the life of Christ and the Holy Spirit. How could there be any more condemnation? God has already occupied Himself with sin in the flesh at the cross, and has now, if one may so say, done with it. The new life and the Holy Spirit give to the believer his place in Christ; he is redeemed and alive before God in Christ. It is not a

question here, as already said, of forgiveness of the sins of the old man, but of a new living position in Christ. This is what is presented in the first verses of chapter viii.

After describing as real facts the experience of the first position in chapter vii., as well as deliverance through redemption in Christ, and the continuance of the two natures, the three first verses of chapter viii. give us the new standing in Christ in contrast with the standing in the flesh, or in the first Adam. In the first verse, no condemnation; in the second, the power of life; in the third, the judgment of sin in the flesh in Christ on the cross. The second verse is characterized by life in Christ according to the power of the Holy Spirit, and that as a principle uninterruptedly in operation. The third verse is characterized by the judgment of sin in the flesh in the sin-offering of Christ. Sin indeed is still there, and it is active in us, if we are not faithful, if we do not practically bear about with us the dying of the Lord Jesus; we lose communion with God, and dishonour the Lord by our behaviour, in not walking, according to the Spirit of life, worthy of the Lord. But we are no longer *under the law of sin*, but, as dead with Christ, and participators of a new life in Him and of the Holy Spirit, we are delivered from the law. We are in a new standing, in the *second* Adam before God; and conformably with our nature our walk is according to the Spirit, not according to the flesh. Thus the law of God and its claims are fulfilled in us. The teaching does not go beyond this, because it is a question of people wanting the law.

But the law is not the measure of Christian walk; it only says that he who walks according to the Spirit

fulfils it. When I was in the flesh, I could not fulfil it, because the flesh is not subject to the law, neither indeed can be, but only follows its own will. The Spirit will surely not lead us into that which is contrary to the law of God. The law is practically fulfilled, whilst we are not under the law, but under the guidance of the Spirit. We are under the influence of the Spirit; and it is not a question of a law *outside* us, but of a nature *in* us, which possesses an object suitable to it. They who live after the Spirit, according to the new man, desire the things of the Spirit; but they that are after the flesh mind the objects of their fleshly lusts. We have not to do here with an imposed law, but a new mind, the mind of a nature which is born of the Spirit, and which seeks what is spiritual; a holy liberty, in that the man, as dead with Christ, is delivered from the yoke of sin, possesses a holy nature born of God, has holy objects before his eyes, and is a dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit, who produces holy thoughts in the heart, and reveals the things which are above. The minding of the flesh is the death of the soul; it bears no fruit, and separates the soul from God, both now and throughout eternity. But the minding of the Spirit is life, a well in us which springs up into everlasting life, and fills the soul with peace. The mind of the flesh opposes itself to the authority of God. In manifesting the activity of the natural man, it has to do with the law, which is the expression of this divine authority over man, and the rule of his responsibility as God's creature. But it is not subject to the law, neither indeed can be, because self-will will go its own way; also it absolutely does not love what is pleasing to God. Thus they that are in the flesh, who

are before God in the standing of the first Adam, and walk according to the life of the first Adam, cannot please God.

In verse 9 we find a very important principle. When can anyone say, "I am not in the flesh"? Answer: When he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. A man can be converted, and yet still be in the condition described in chapter vii.; as, for example, the prodigal son before he met his father. He was converted and in the right way, yet he only wished to be a hired servant of his father. But as soon as he had met his father we hear nothing more of it, but only what his father was and what he did for him. Deliverance comes through the personal knowledge of what the Father is, known in Jesus Christ, through the knowledge of redemption. And this is only found in a soul in which the Holy Spirit dwells. A converted man, as such, is only in the Christian standing when he has been anointed. The conscience and heart of the prodigal son were reached by grace, and rightly directed, when he was on the way to his father's house; but he was not yet clad in the best robe, and did not yet know the Father's heart. But he entered into the Christian standing when he reached his father; and from this moment we hear no more of him, but only of his Father. Previously his condition was not fit for the house.

In verse 10 we see the other side of the Christian position. At the beginning of the chapter it says, "Which are *in Christ Jesus*;" and here, "If *Christ be in you*." Thus on the one hand the Christian is in Christ; and on the other, Christ is in him. We are *in Christ*, according to all His perfection before God; *Christ in us* is the ground and measure of our responsi-

bility, whilst He is the source of our strength, and that according to what has been said in the beginning of the chapter. A Christian is a man who is not only born again (which is absolutely necessary), but who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He directs the eye of the believer to the work of Christ, and teaches him to appreciate its worth, giving him the consciousness that he is in Christ, and Christ in him (John xiv.), and filling his heart with the hope of glory, with the certainty that he will be like Christ and with Christ for ever and ever. A converted man is delivered when he knows that his sins are forgiven; when he can cry, "Abba, Father;" when he has the knowledge that for him there is no more condemnation; he is in liberty before God, and is freed from the law of sin and death. But he is not a perfect Christian until he comprehends by the Holy Spirit that he occupies the position of Christ, that God is His Father and God in the same manner as He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, until he understands that he has passed out of the standing of Adam into the standing of Christ, that he has died with Christ; and thus he lives no more, but Christ lives in him. (Gal. ii. 20.)

This liberty is most clearly presented and developed in the epistle to the Romans, yet only in so far as the believer is therein considered as dead with Christ, and possessing Christ as his life, whereby he is delivered from the law of sin, as also from the Mosaic law, because this has dominion over a man so long as he lives, and cannot go further. The epistle, however, does not take up the counsels of God and the glory of our new position, though they are touched upon in chap. viii. 29, 30. But in general the epistle takes up man's

responsibility, as well as what God has done to cleanse us from our guilt and to justify us, teaching us at the same time how we are delivered from the law of sin and death by our being dead with Christ. The above-mentioned verses give a somewhat larger view; but the new position is not more closely developed. The epistle does not go beyond the truth that we are made alive through Christ; it does not speak of our resurrection with Him. This, the starting-point of our new position, we must look for in the epistle to the Colossians. This doctrine is further developed in the epistle to the Ephesians, from another point of view, however. There we do not find that a child of Adam must die and be raised, and that the believer is dead, although he is presented as risen with Christ. The unconverted man is looked at rather in the Ephesians as *dead* in sins, and all is a *new* creation. We there find all the counsels of God, as well with regard to believers raised with Christ, as to Christ Himself; to the children of God and our union with Christ as His body.

It is well to remark that whilst the first three verses of chapter viii. give us the *principles* of deliverance, so the following eight verses describe the practical character and the *result* of deliverance. The Holy Spirit acts in the new life, instead of an external law which the flesh sets itself invincibly to resist. The Spirit furnishes the new life with heavenly objects, in which it finds its joy and sustenance. "To be spiritually-minded is life and peace." All this depends on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." We have already said that the condition of such an

one is similar to that of the prodigal son before he had found his father. If, on the contrary, the Spirit of Christ dwells in one who is converted, then the body is dead for him on account of sin; but the Spirit is life on account of righteousness. If the body lives by virtue of its own life, it brings forth nothing but sin; but according to chap. vi. the spiritual man reckons it dead.

The Spirit is inseparable from the new life. He is the source of the life, and that which characterizes it. Now if the Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus dwells in us, He who raised up Christ from the dead will also quicken our mortal bodies on account of His Spirit which dwelleth in us. This is the blessed end of the life of the Spirit in Christ Jesus, or rather its beginning in true perfection. The Spirit is God's Spirit. God has raised Jesus as a Man—*Jesus* is His *personal* name. But it was not for Himself that He lay in death; Christ is His name, as come for others. If then the Spirit of God dwells in us, He who raised up the First-Begotten will raise up also the sheep He has redeemed.

Three characteristic names are here attributed to the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of God (*v. 9*) in contrast with the flesh; the Spirit of Christ as the formative power of the new man; and the Spirit of Him who raised up Christ from among the dead, because He is the pledge in us of our resurrection.

The glorious end of delivering grace is reached; the circumstances by which we are surrounded remain doubtless the same; and the following verses of the chapter give us our position before God in connection with these circumstances.

J. N. D.

JOTTINGS.

I. FAITH.

WE must remember that it begins with God, and always he who is walking really in a path of faith brings GOD in, and this is the difference between it and unbelief; unbelief always leaves Him out. Again, faith is the individual soul *alone with God*, and any intervention of a third party destroys it. Any acting from *secondary* motives is not faith. It must be God and His word *alone* before the soul for the act to be an act of faith.

Faith grows. This can be learnt in the history of the children of God, and as detailed in Heb. xi. To bring God into *everything* is the privilege now of His children. There is nothing too small in our daily path for Him to notice who has numbered even the hairs of our head. It is this bringing God into all our matters that produces the walk, the *life of faith*, and which is the subject of the chapter I have referred to.

And it is just this bringing God into our matters that reveals to us the true character of them; for "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." Thus this, by becoming the continual habit of the soul, becomes at once a preserving power for it in the midst of all the darkness and unbelief of our natural hearts.

The principle for the Christian now is found in the words, "He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." We must see God in everything.

In the examples of Heb. xi. we see they *began* with God. This is faith, and this characterizes each one after. In Abel's act God's claim is admitted, and in

the sacrifice Abel confesses that he merited death as the sinner. He comes in the provided way, and is accepted, "God testifying of his gifts." So GOD is before Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and the others. This settled everything for each in his day.

It is important just simply to grasp what real faith is, that it begins with God, and continues to have to *do* with God, and that it is intensely individual. We are glad and thankful to find others in the path of faith with us; but this having always to do with God now individually (which was true of us at first) is the power to sustain us still going on in the path *if others fail us*, and still produces the works seen in a life of faith. When a trial comes, if there has not been this individual intercourse with God, it is often found that we have been merely imitators of others. We then, like Ephraim, "being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle." (Psalm lxxviii.) But if we have been in the habit of bringing God in, we shall turn to Him in the day of battle, and turning to Him is not turning our back to the enemy.*

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

II. "THERE AM I IN THE MIDST."

Is there in us an adequate sense of the wonderful grace and favour conferred upon us in being allowed to gather together with the Lord's people on earth? Can there be any thing higher than to be thus with Him,

* We only *really* help others when we bring them to have to do with God and His word for themselves. If they act merely on advice, from however godly a brother, they will at last break down; it is not faith. I must be careful that I do not lead saints to act merely on *my advice*, or they are acting on *my* faith.

and in communion with His own heart as to His people? Think of it. Who is He there in the midst? It is a wonderful place, and but poorly we value it, so little do we know of what its reality is. Faith sees Him there.

And then not only to be privileged to gather together thus, but think of the further favour of being of *any use* there; of being used by Him who loves His people with a perfect love, and whose whole heart goes out for *them* in their weakness, and in this day of their sorrow and rejection (a day of rejection once gone through before by Himself). It is a heart *beating in harmony with His own for them* that He can take up to make any of us helpful to them. This is what we want to cultivate. We want to know *His* thoughts at that very moment for His gathered saints. Without this all is barrenness, all activity painful; with it, even the silent prayer of the simple one—oft incapable of being framed into language—calls down His own blessing upon those who in their weakness are cast upon Him.

It is not more activity we want, as gathered to His name; it is more *communion*. HE is there; the people are *His* people. I have to remember that He wills the blessing of His people, and to say, "Who am I, to be in *this* place?"

III. SELF-OCCUPATION AND SELF-JUDGMENT.

Many confound self-occupation with self-judgment; and, seeing self-judgment to be right (when we fail), are found asking themselves where the one ends, and where the other begins. And self-occupation they question. A word or two on these may help, if the Lord permit.

Self-occupation is the bane of the soul. Man makes himself the centre, and himself the chief object upon

earth. This is self-occupation. It lands him in that place "where their worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched." To all self-occupation is death.

Self-judgment is the work of the Spirit of God. It is not His *proper*, but it is often, from our want of watchfulness, His *necessary* work. There is no way of return to the joy of communion without it. Self-judgment, though right in its place, is *not* communion; on the contrary, it is the confession that communion is *lost*. But it is the only way back; it is medicine, but not food.

For me to live daily with self ignored is the highest Christian condition. Here the Spirit of God is free to carry on His proper work in my soul, to take Christ and put *Him* before me as my food. Here the soul is free to be occupied by and for *Christ alone*. It says, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." It is the only right state for food. And *food* is the soul's appropriation of Christ, and feeding upon *Him* as ministered by the Spirit. He alone is the "bread of life that came down from heaven;" as John vi. 56 says, "He that eateth my flesh, and *drinketh* my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." It is not the *having* done so once by faith. That is in verse 51, and is of first importance. Food is the *daily* need of the man, and it is here his daily habit to feed. But how important to see that self-occupation is *not* food, and that self-judgment is *not* food; for how can I live or grow without food?

What then is self-occupation? It is a human being, a worm of the earth in God's sight, a particle of dust, forgetting or ignoring the fact of GOD and ETERNITY; one who says, "Let us eat and drink: for to-morrow we die," and to whom God says, "Thou fool!" (1 Cor. xv.; Luke xii. 20.)

What is self-judgment? It is looking at yourself (note it well), not in contrast with other saints, but in contrast with *Christ*, the perfect, heavenly Man.

And what is self-ignored? It is the forgetting that there is a self, through pre-occupation with the perfect One, with Christ alone. This will be our eternal occupation in heaven, when there will be no "self" to mar our vision, or to call for judgment. But it begins on earth—begins, though harassed on every hand, in a poor earthen vessel, "that the excellency of the power may be" seen to be "of God, and not of us." (2 Cor. iv.)

H. C. A.

THE BOOK OF EZRA.

CHAP. iii. 1-7.

AT the close of the last chapter we have seen that "all Israel"—the remnant in fact, but taking the place of the nation before God—dwelt in their cities. The commencement of this chapter opens out another remarkable action of the Spirit of God. "And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem." (v. 1.) In the book of Numbers we read, "In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work; it is a day of blowing the trumpets unto you." (xxix. 1.) This feast of trumpets prefigured the restoration of Israel in the last days; and it was therefore with a true spiritual perception that the people assembled themselves in Jerusalem at this time—a perception which, combined with their perfect unity, showed that both they and their leaders had been

taught of God, and were under the power of His word. (Compare Acts ii. 1.) It is but seldom in the history of God's people that such oneness has been displayed, because it can only be produced, not by any general agreement, but by the common subjection of all alike to the power of the Spirit through the truth. Twice only has it been seen in the history of the Church (see Acts ii., iv.), and now it will never more be displayed on earth in the Church at large, though it might perhaps be exhibited in small companies of the saints. But here, as at Pentecost, the whole congregation were as one man—one will dominating all, and gathering them with irresistible power to one common centre; for they were all with one accord in one place in the city on which the mind and heart of God were at that time set.

Having thus assembled, "there stood up Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt-offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. And they set the altar upon its bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries; and they offered burnt-offerings thereon unto the Lord, even burnt-offerings morning and evening." (*vv.* 2, 3.) The governor, Zerubbabel, and the priest, Jeshua (aided by their respective "brethren"), united in this blessed work, the combination of the two foreshadowing Him who will be a priest on His throne, the true Melchizedek. (See Zech. vi. 9-15.)

One of their motives in the erection of the altar would seem to have been their felt need of the protection of their God, and faith discerned that this protection would be ensured on the ground of the efficacy of

the sacrifices. And what could be more beautiful than this exhibition of confidence in God? They were but a feeble remnant, having no outward means of defence, and surrounded by enemies of every kind; but their very weakness and peril had taught them the precious lesson, that God was their refuge and strength. The setting up of the altar was therefore their first object; and as soon as the sweet savour of the burnt-offerings ascended up to God, all that He was, as then revealed, was engaged on their behalf.

It will be moreover observed that their burnt-offerings were presented morning and evening. This was called, at their original institution, the "continual burnt-offering" (see Exodus xxix. 38-46), in virtue of which God had been able to dwell in the midst of His people. And if His presence was no longer in their midst, if He dwelt no longer between the cherubim overshadowing the mercy-seat, *the efficacy of the burnt-offering remained*; and as long as faith brought this, and presented it to God morning and evening, the people were as surely under the protection of Jehovah as before; as safe as, indeed far safer than, when Jerusalem in her glory was surrounded by her fortified walls and bulwarks. They might have therefore adopted the language of one of their psalms: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof." (Psalm xlvi. 1-3.)

The altar having been duly ordered, they kept the feast of tabernacles, as it is written (see Lev. xxiii. 33-36), and offered the daily burnt-offerings by number,

according to the custom, as the duty of every day required. The feast of tabernacles was a figure of millennial joy. (Lev. xxiii. 40.) Israel was to rejoice before the Lord their God seven days. To human eyes looking at their desolate condition it might have seemed a mockery for these poor returned captives to be keeping a joyful feast. But faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," and thus brings the future into present realization. Moreover, when the soul once stands before God in all the acceptance of Christ, as prefigured by the burnt-offering, it has already the certainty of every promised blessing as secured in Him. It was thus open to the believing Israelites, who stood around the altar which they had erected amid the ruins of the temple; and as they saw the smoke of the burnt-offerings ascend up to heaven, to look onward to the time when all God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be fulfilled, and when the ransomed of the Lord would return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; when they would obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing should flee away.

They also, we are told, "offered the continual burnt-offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill-offering unto the Lord." (v. 5.) And it will be remarked that the striking feature of all their proceedings was, *that they ordered everything now according to the word of God.* (vv. 2, 4.) Whatever they may have practised in Babylon, whatever had been their traditional rites and customs, all these had been left behind in the scene of their captivity; and now, delivered and brought back, nothing

could satisfy them short of the authority of the written Word.

We might therefore characterize the proceedings narrated in this passage as *the restoration of scriptural worship*. This contains a principle of immense importance, and one that has found an illustration within the memory of some who are still living. There was a movement some fifty or sixty years ago, as already pointed out in a previous chapter, corresponding largely, as to its spiritual features, with this deliverance from Babylon; and the first object of the saints at that time, as with this remnant, was the restoration of the altar (using this term as a symbol of worship), and the ordering of the assembly in all its meetings according to the written Word. Customs, traditions, observances, all rites and ceremonies, were now tested by the recorded apostolic practices, and such as could not stand the proof were abandoned. It was but a remnant also that were brought out of bondage; but they had light and life in their dwellings and in their gatherings, because "as one man" they sought to give the Lord Jesus Christ His rightful place of pre-eminence as Son over His own house. In truth, God owned this movement in a remarkable manner, using it to recall believers, in every part of the land, to the authority of the written Word, to the knowledge of the fulness of His grace in redemption, to their priestly place and privileges, to the truth of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and to the expectation of the Lord's return. And if the spiritual power of that day has not been maintained, its influence is still felt; and it is not too much to say that the whole church of God is its debtor, through the sovereign grace and appointment of God, for the ex-

hibition and preservation of the full-orbed truths of Christianity. Before that time Christianity, in the hands of its public advocates, had degenerated into a mere code of morals, and the consequence was Socinianism and widespread infidelity; whereas since that day, whatever the increasing power of evil, and the rapid development of the signs of the coming apostasy, there has never been wanting a full testimony to the truth of God, and to His Christ as glorified at His right hand. All this proclaims to us, as with a trumpet voice, that the path of obedience to the written Word, in the power of the Spirit, is both the path of recovery from error, the secret of all blessing, and the true method of arresting spiritual decline.

The first five verses of this chapter are a delightful record, and might well be studied in connection with the first days of the Church after Pentecost. (Acts ii.-iv.) In both places alike individual, as well as collective or corporate, spiritual energy is manifested. Thus it was not only the new moons and the set feasts that are noticed as having been observed, but it is added, "And every one that willingly offered a freewill-offering unto the Lord." (v. 5.) When God's Spirit is acting in power, He fills the hearts of many of His people to overflowing, and the vessel, not being able to contain the blessing, runs over in thanksgiving and praise to God. This is the secret both of devotedness and worship.

The two next verses close up this period, preparatory to the introduction of another. "From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. They gave money also unto the

masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia." (*vv.* 6, 7.) The record of the commencement of offering burnt-offerings the first day of the seventh month is made with evident delight. It was grateful to the heart of God to behold the return of His people to Himself, acknowledging His claims, and the only ground of their acceptance. It shows us how particularly He observes the actions of His own, and that He takes pleasure in their approach and worship. Producing these fruits by His grace in their hearts, with the same grace He puts them to their account. (Compare Eph. ii. 10, and 2 Cor. v. 10.)

Then follows, as we judge, a note of sadness—"But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid." The people had responded largely to the grace and goodness of Jehovah in their restoration, they had rejoiced to place themselves under His protection, and had ordered His worship according as it was written in the law of Moses the man of God. But at present they went no farther. Instead of entering into God's thoughts respecting His house, they rested in the blessings into which they had now been brought. Their spiritual energy had in measure expended itself in their first efforts, and their temptation was now to pause before going farther. Such has ever been the history of all real revivals in the church of God. Take, for example, that mighty work of God, of which Luther was the instrument. At the outset the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures was the battle-axe with which he waged war upon the corruptions and idolatries

of Rome, and God wrought with him and granted a remarkable deliverance. But what followed? Luther, and his followers alike, rested in and feasted upon the fruits of their first victories, and the Reformation subsided into a system of State churches and creeds, out of which all vitality soon departed. (See Rev. iii. 1-3.) They failed to go on in communion with the mind of God—they laboured for their own objects rather than His, and the consequence was that blight and decay soon showed themselves; the movement was arrested; and now, to-day, the very truths which were then recovered are fast fading away (if they have not already gone) from the very places which were the scene of the conflict.

We learn therefore that the safety of God's people lies in their rising to the height of their calling. He calls us to fellowship with Himself, and with His Son Jesus Christ. If, forgetting this, we are satisfied with the enjoyment of our blessings, and lose sight of God's desires for us, feebleness and decline will soon mark us, whether as individuals or as companies of believers. If, on the other hand, God's objects are ours, our minds are set upon what is before Him, He will ever lead us on into fuller intelligence of His purposes of grace, as well as of His ways, and into larger blessedness. He delights in our happiness, and He would ever increase this by associating us in His grace with His own objects and aims.

If, however, the children of Israel did not prosecute the work of the Lord with all diligence, they were not unmindful of the purpose of their restoration; for, as we have seen, they began to make provision for the materials wherewith to build the temple. (*v.* 7.) To understand the circumstances of the remnant in

contrast with the glory of the kingdom when Solomon's temple was built, 1 Kings v., and 1 Chron. xxviii., xxix., should be read. Together with this, it should be remembered that Jehovah was the same, and that His resources were as available, through the exercise of faith, for this feeble remnant as for David and Solomon in all their power and splendour. True they were outwardly dependent upon the grant of a Gentile monarch for permission to build, and for the means to secure the necessary materials; but it was God's work on which they were engaged, and, counting upon Him, He would enable them to prosecute it to a successful issue. When believers work with God, their apparent difficulties and obstacles become the servants of faith to bring God in, before whom crooked things are made straight, and rough places plain.

E. D.

PRINCIPLES are not power. If principles occupy the mind, even with the most earnest desire for accuracy, so as to become the object instead of Christ, there will be the absence of spiritual power. The secret of power is not merely having orthodox principles, but exercising faith in God, according to the truth He has graciously revealed. For instance, many accept, as a divinely-given principle of truth, that where two or three are gathered together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that there He is "in the midst of them." But those only who have faith in the Lord as present will have the power and comfort of it. This is individual. The power and blessing therefore of a company of saints is connected with the individual faith of those gathered.

H. H. S.

OUR LORD'S LOVING REQUEST.

"This do in remembrance of me."—1 COR. xi. 24, 25.

WE do not go to the gospels for our instruction and authority as to the Lord's supper; for about this He has since then spoken to us from heaven, as was revealed to the Church by the apostle Paul. (1 Cor. xi. 23.) True it is that in the gospels we find, after keeping the passover, that our Lord took bread, gave thanks, brake, and gave to His disciples, saying, "Take eat, this is my body," &c.; and so far we may speak of it as the Lord's institution of His supper. But though it is more or less spoken of by all the four evangelists, it is only Luke who records our Lord's special request—"This do in remembrance of me," and he names it only once. Moreover, in the gospels the hope connected with it, as set forth by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, was the kingdom—"I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom;" for the Lord was then looking to the restoration and blessing of the nation of Israel, ere He will know joy in the world, and then His people will share it with Him. When He was drawing nigh to the cross of Calvary, He said to His disciples, "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me;" and truly it is the case that since He was taken down from the cross no worldling's eye has rested upon Him. His mission to the earth then closed; and joy on earth, in which He will participate, can only be when He takes to Himself His great power,

and establishes the long-looked-for kingdom on earth in righteousness.

With Christ rejected by the world, and hated without a cause by His own nation, but raised by God from among the dead, and glorified as Man on His own right hand, an entirely new order begins. The world being now under sentence of judgment, the Jews dispersed in governmental displeasure because of their sin, the kingdom so often spoken of by prophets is in abeyance until He shall come, whose right it is. Meanwhile the Holy Ghost is received and shed forth by the exalted Saviour, the veil having been rent from the top to the bottom; and the Forerunner having gone into heaven itself by His own blood, the Father's love, counsels, and ways are having their accomplishment in calling out a body and bride for the Son; while we are taught to look for His coming again, at any time, to take us bodily and for ever out of this scene to the Father's house, and so be for ever with the Lord.

It is not difficult then to see why, when Israel for a time is governmentally given up, and a new order of blessing begun in connection with the Son of man being in the glory of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, instead of looking forward to the "kingdom," we are taught by the Lord from heaven to keep His supper "till He come."

As those who know we have redemption in Christ, and by His precious blood, it is surely the delight of our hearts to do what is pleasing in His sight, who said, "This do in remembrance of me;" and observe that in this loving request we have something to do, as well as someone to remember. It is also the expression

of one body. "This do" implies an act to be carried out with others. We may have sweet remembrances of the Saviour's precious words and ways and suffering unto death for us when alone; but here it is something to be done. Our Lord took bread, gave thanks, brake, and gave them saying, "Take, eat." "This do in remembrance of me." After the same manner also He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come." It is not true then that I can remember the Lord at home, when alone, in the same way as when gathered with others to His name to carry out His mind, in thus eating of the bread and drinking of the cup. There is, in carrying out this special request of our Lord, something to be done—"This do;" so that if I do not do it, I do not carry out His mind.

Then there is a Person to be remembered; not what He has done, blessed as it is always to think of it, but Himself. We are to remember Him; not, as is often said, that we come together to remember His death, but to remember Him. And surely the difference is great in its effect on our souls, whether we are thinking of a work done for us, or of the loving One who did it. No doubt when we are occupied with Him in eating the bread and drinking the cup, we cannot forget His death and the love that brought Him there for us—that love which many waters could not quench, nor all the power of man or Satan hinder. But while in doing this we remember Him, we also announce or show forth His death. This should be our employ "till He come." "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do

shew the Lord's death till He come." (1 Cor. xi. 26.) How soon He may come for us!

In our doing this, there is not only the discerning of the Lord's body, but the expression of the "one body" in our breaking and eating of the same loaf. We have our *individual* thoughts and exercises of faith and love in thus remembering Him; but here believers are gathered together, and because we are "many" we are *collectively* the expression of being one body in Christ. "For we being many are one bread" (or loaf): "for we are all partakers of that one loaf." (1 Cor. x. 17.) It is important to see this as characterizing the Lord's table, as we are so instructed by the apostle who was specially called to minister to the Church. (Col. i. 25.) We have no such thoughts in the account given in the gospels of the institution of the supper, because Israel had not then been formally given up, nor had the mystery of the Church been revealed; but when the assembly was revealed to Paul, and made known to others by the Spirit, then the fitting time came for teaching those who were members of the body of Christ, that in the act of doing this, in remembrance of the Lord, there is the expression of our being one with all other believers—"one body." Let us not fail to notice also that in the evangelist's account of the Lord's supper only apostles—men, and not women—partook of it; but when the Church is set up on earth, then all believers are addressed as to their great privilege in thus remembering the Lord till He come. May we know more of the Lord's mind as to this, and of our accountability to Him who is in the midst of those gathered together in His name.

H. H. S.

REMARKS ON
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HOLDING THE
TRUTH OF "ONE BODY" AND KEEPING
"THE SPIRIT'S UNITY."

EVERY child of God, indwelt by the Holy Ghost, is a member of the "one body," which is formed by "one Spirit." The body cannot be broken or divided, for it is formed by divine power; but the manifestation of the one body and one Spirit has utterly failed, hence the present confusion in Christendom.

We are enjoined to practically act out the membership of "one body," and the activity of "one Spirit" leads to it; but we are never told to keep the unity of the body, but "the unity of the Spirit." The Holy Spirit is the *power* for everything that is according to God; and He orders through the Word everything as to our private walk, and as to our collective action on assembly ground.

If THE LORD speaks to His assemblies, He bids us "hear what the Spirit saith;" and as there is *one* Spirit, and He dwells in the assembly on earth, He bids every individual to hear what the Spirit saith to every assembly. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the assemblies." (Rev. ii., iii.) The Lord therefore calls on every member of the "one body" to hear what He saith about every assembly. If every member of the "one body" heard therefore what the Spirit saith unto the assemblies, and acted on it, the Spirit's unity would be kept. But all members of the "one body" do not hear, and, it may be, do not care to hear, what the Spirit saith. Is it not clear then that those who do hear *must act* in faithfulness to the Lord, and, however sorrowfully, separate from those who do

not hear what the Spirit saith? For we are commanded at all costs to *keep the Spirit's unity* in the bond of peace. How else could it be fully kept?

An evil might break out in some part of the world among those who, in these last days, are gathered on the ground of God's assembly of a character hitherto unknown. What should the faithful do? It (the evil) may be in a place a thousand miles off, or more; but can we be indifferent to it? Impossible, if we believe in "one Spirit" dwelling in the Church or assembly. Would not such at once make the Lord their refuge, and turn to "the word of His grace"? Does not the Spirit lead true hearts in this way? Well, the Lord saith, "Hear what the Spirit saith." And such would soon find that the Spirit exposes and rebukes it as unholy, as contrary to the truth, and unsuited to Him who is the Holy and the True. Those who look only to men must go wrong; those only can have the Lord's mind who wait on Him and honour the Holy Ghost.

And, further, (1) the Spirit's unity must be according to holiness or separation from evil; for He is a **HOLY Spirit**.

2. It must be according to the truth (and we know who said, "Thy word is truth"); for *the Spirit is truth*, and He guides into *all the truth*.

3. The path of the Spirit must certainly have in view the honour and glory of "the Son;" for Jesus said, "He shall glorify me." Happy are those who look above men's heads, and amid, it may be, much failure "hear what the Spirit saith."

4. Those who oppose the action of the "one Spirit" in any measure, or for any reason, seriously dishonour the Lord, grieve the Holy Spirit whereby they are

sealed, damage their own souls, perhaps mislead others, mar the testimony of God, and fall under His rebuke.

May all who read these lines look unto Him who is able to keep us from falling; and may our cry be, "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe." H. H. S.

GLEANINGS.

I.

WHAT is the standard of our walk? God Himself. It sounds immense; but when we think of it in an honest conscience, we see that is what it must be; for Christ is our example.

II.

You cannot separate standing and state if you bring in resurrection; but you can if you think only of the *blood of Christ*. When I say I am risen, I say I have a nature that cannot find its pleasure in the things of the world. Of course the blood of Christ gives us strong motives too, for we are "bought with a price."

III.

Christ seen in glory is the spring of energy to Christian life, to win Christ, so that all else is loss; as Christ making Himself of no reputation is the spring of Christian graciousness of walk—the two parts of Christian life which we are too apt to sacrifice one to another, or at least to pursue one forgetful of the other. In both Paul singularly shines.

IV.

The Father's house is a different thing to God's house, for it puts us in the relationship of children. When He speaks of sovereignty, it is God; but when He speaks of grace, it is the Father. John iv. 23, 24. The Father first, then God; so also in 1 John i. 3-5.

J. N. D.

MEDITATIONS ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

CHAPTER VIII. (vs. 12-19.)

“THEREFORE, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.” (v. 12.) It has brought us into a bad condition and a bad position. However, we are no longer *in* the flesh, but delivered from it through redemption; we have been brought into a new position through the Redeemer’s death, of which we have the consciousness through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The two lives, the two principles, are directly opposed the one to the other; and it is important to remark (what has already been established as a principle in chap. vi.) that these natures, whenever they act, bring forth consequences in accordance with their natures. I can overcome the flesh by the Spirit; I have the right and the duty to reckon it dead. But if the flesh lives, it brings forth death; and if I live according to the flesh, death is my lot. The nature, and the operations of this nature—its consequences—are ever the same. God can give me a *new* nature, and—His name be praised for it—He gives it to me in Christ; and in such a way that salvation is thereby my portion, and that in the power of the Spirit I am enabled to overcome the old nature and walk after the Spirit. But the nature of the flesh is not changed, any more than its consequences for itself. If I live after the flesh I must die. Grace redeems; gives me a new life in which I walk after the Spirit and reckon the flesh dead; and finally it gives me the glory. But

this new life does not live after the flesh, nay, it cannot do so. If I live after the flesh, then I die at a distance from God; for death is the fruit and wages of the life of the flesh. But if through the Spirit I mortify the deeds of the body, then I live, and shall live for ever with God, from whom this life flows down into my soul, and whose Spirit is its strength and guide.

This gives occasion for the apostle to speak of the position of those who are led by the Spirit of God, and in the first place of their relation to God. The Spirit which they have received is the Spirit of adoption; they possess it because they are children. But extensive blessings flow from this relationship; if they are children they are also heirs—heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. Meanwhile the condition of the creation around us, and particularly that of our own bodies, is not yet restored. “The *carnal* mind is enmity against God.” In the same way the friendship of the *world* is enmity against Him. The principles of the flesh and of the world resist us; both are subjected to the bondage of corruption. Moreover the world through which we pass, being at a distance from God, and under the dominion of Satan, is for us the source of countless sorrows and afflictions. The Lord Jesus was in this world “a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” A world of *sin* in contrast with His holiness, a world of sorrow and of *grief* in contrast with His love, could not but be for His heart a source of sorrow and grief. He was solitary and alone in such a world, and was not once understood by His disciples. Himself full of sympathy for all, He found sympathy nowhere for Himself. When such a thing did once break through the darkness of man’s heart,

it was something so wonderful that the Lord says, "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her." (Mark xiv. 9.)

Can we, possessed of the Spirit of Christ, go through this world without feeling its condition? Should not our hearts be grieved when we see at every turn the dominion of sin, and have daily before our eyes the sufferings of sinful man, when we see that all is under the bondage of corruption? The time will come when we shall behold the universal blessing of the world, and when we shall rejoice therein with God Himself. But now, as those whose hearts are renewed and delivered, we can but suffer in the midst of an undelivered creation.

Let us remark, however, that this is suffering *with* Christ, not *for* Him. To suffer *for* Christ is a privilege, a special gift of God. (Phil. i. 29.) One cannot be a Christian without suffering *with* Christ; for how could the Spirit of Christ produce in us a different mind from that which was in Christ as He passed through this poor world? The glory of the children of God is a subject of hope. Now the *sufferings* of Christ in weakness are reproduced in a heart in which Christ dwells. We suffer here, where Christ suffered, as heirs of the kingdom of love where all will be joy and delight. Although we are now already children, or rather sons, and therefore heirs, yet we do not yet possess the inheritance; nay, we cannot yet possess it, for it is still corrupt and defiled, and in this condition would not suit us. Christ is seated at the right hand of God until His enemies are made His footstool. Then we shall reign with Him and be like Him.

Therefore the apostle, who knew well what suffering was, could say, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." We are in the relationship of sons, and consciously so, and therefore are without fear. Where there is fear, the knowledge of this position is not in the heart. The Spirit in us cries, "Abba, Father!" and it cannot be otherwise, for He only came after all was accomplished which has placed us in this relationship. Christ has given us His own position before God. After accomplishing all that was requisite, as well for the glory of God as for our salvation, there indeed where it had to be accomplished for both—namely, in the place of sin—"made sin for us," as Man He has gone up into heaven. In Him a Man has entered into the glory of God, the other side of sin, death, the power of Satan, the judgment of God against sin, so that He could send the message to His disciples by Mary Magdalene—"Say to my brethren that I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." Thereupon He sent down the Holy Spirit as the blessed result of His ascension as Man into heaven, after having fully accomplished our redemption. This Spirit dwells in believers who are resting on the value of His blood, so that their body is a temple of the Holy Ghost. (1 Cor. vi.) They are sealed by the Spirit and have the earnest of the inheritance, the consciousness that they are the children of God. He presents Christ, who is in heaven, and causes us to enjoy unseen things. It would therefore be impossible that He should be a Spirit of fear or of bondage.

But the operations of the Spirit in us are twofold.

He leads us to appreciate the glory which lies before us, and gives us the sense that the sufferings through which we are brought in striving to reach this glory, and in faithfulness to Christ, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed, so that we can pursue the path of God with fresh courage and perseverance. Likewise also He helps us in our weakness, so that we may take part in these sufferings according to God; and that through the Spirit our hearts may be vessels of sympathy answering to the heart of Christ, whilst our groans are an expression of the groans of a suffering creation to God. What a precious position thus to be able to realize His glory and love, who came down into the midst of a suffering creation, so that although as to our bodies we belong to a fallen creation, yet our hearts by the Spirit can be the mouth-piece of the whole creation, and can express according to God its groans to Him. Into this feeling the heart of Christ entered to the full in love and perfection. A true Man, yet as to His person absolutely free from the sin which had brought these sufferings upon creation, His sympathy with us in the consequences of sin was all the more perfect. "He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." (Compare Matt. viii. 17.) At the grave of Lazarus, seeing Mary and all the Jews weeping, He groaned in His Spirit and was troubled.* Thus although as fallen creatures weakness and imperfection are our lot, yet we are permitted to share, by the indwelling Spirit, in the sufferings of creation, not indeed with selfish impatience, because we suffer ourselves, but *according to God*. The picture drawn by the apostle of

* Both the words employed here in the Greek text are very strongly expressive of an inward emotion.

the condition of creation around us will make this experience clearer; although in the foregoing different points have been already considered, we can nevertheless begin once more at verse 19.

It has been already observed that we have to suffer in the *world* because it is all lying in sin and confusion, we having been brought back to God; and further, that our hearts also have to suffer because we dwell in the midst of an undelivered creation. But the eye of faith is fixed on the glory which lies before us, and this joyful prospect, together with the fellowship which we enjoy with God already down here, makes us realize that what is around us is unreconciled.

Creation awaits deliverance; but it cannot be delivered and restored until the children of God in the glory of the kingdom are ready to take possession of it as joint-heirs with Christ. Christ sits at the right hand of God until these joint-heirs are gathered. It is a blessed thought, that as *we* have brought the earthly creation under the bondage of corruption, so now it must wait to be restored and delivered from this bondage until *we* are *glorified*. (v. 19.) The creation was not subject to bondage willingly; *we* have done it—but in hope; for this condition will not always last; the creation will be restored. God, however, in the counsels of grace, begins with the guilty, with those who are the farthest off, with those towards whom in the ages to come He will show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. (Eph. ii. 7; compare Col. i. 20, 21.)

The creation being merely a physical thing, cannot enter into the liberty of grace; it must wait for the liberty of the glory of the *children of God*. When they

are delivered, and their bodies which belong to this creation are changed and glorified—when Satan is bound—then the creature also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption in which it lies enthralled. For we know—those of us who are instructed in the truth of Christianity—that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. We know it yet more because we have the first-fruits of the Spirit; and “we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” We wait with patience to possess that which is saved by hope; not only eternal life as life—this we have already—but to be glorified when our bodies, which belong to the creation, will be changed, and we shall be made like Christ the Lord according to the power whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself. (Phil. iii. 21.)

J. N. D.

It is remarkable in John, that, while he speaks of love, he always guards it in the most definite way by what he calls “the truth.” Real charity is in God Himself. He is love, and wherever love is real it must be guarded by the truth as it is in Jesus, or it is not of God.

If you want to know what makes a Christian happy in life and death, it is that the Christ he has got now is the Christ he will have in heaven. He has got his home there, where the One he loves and knows best is already.

SALVATION.

To state that the salvation of God is worthy of its supreme author expresses all that can be said of it, in height, depth, and breadth, to the soul which already knows Him. But to souls which, to their shame, "have not the knowledge of God," it is manifest the above statement can convey little if any real meaning. Indeed, it is in this great salvation that God has been pleased to reveal Himself. Objectively, we perceive this in Simeon's adoring utterance (Luke ii.), when he saw God's *salvation* in the blessed babe by whom God was to be—yea, was—declared. The two things go together; the *salvation* of God, and the *revelation* of God. And this is also true subjectively, so that the saved soul knows God; as we read, "Every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God." (1 John iv. 7.) And again, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John xvii. 3.)

Salvation is the precious stream which not only satisfies, but leads upward to its source in God. The living water flows from the throne of God and the Lamb in the millennial day. (Rev. xxii.; also Ezek. xlvi.) It satisfies in the wilderness also, alike on the borders of the land, and at the opening of the wilderness journey. Nor have we to wait until the millennial day for enjoyment of the blessed source. It was at the *commencement* of the journey God could say, "Ye have seen how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you *unto myself*." (Exodus xix. 4.)

The various features of salvation may be taken to indicate various points in the unfoldings of God, as well as various stages in the history of a soul's experience.

So that growing gradually "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim. iii. 15) is co-ordinate with increasing in the knowledge of God. (Col. i. 10.)

It would be altogether beyond the scope of this paper to review the features referred to, or perhaps even enumerate them. Our purpose is to speak of three, a clear apprehension of which seems essential to our standing before God, and holiness of life; and which for this reason hold a paramount place. They bear upon our past, our present, and our future; and inasmuch as the term *salvation* is applied to each of these features, it is quite possible unintentionally to confound them. They are not *three* salvations, but various features of the same great work, in which the three persons of the blessed Trinity *may* be seen severally to act a special part, but which certainly link themselves severally to various interventions of the blessed Son of God in our behalf; first, as to the *past*, linking itself with His *death*; secondly, as to the present, with His life of intercession now, unceasingly, on high; third, as to the future, with His coming to take us to be with Himself and like Himself, perfectly, and for ever—His death, however, being the basis of all else.

Nothing is more sorrowful than the confusion which is made by a wrong application of the particular scripture in which any one of these features is referred to. Thus, how often has Rom. xiii. 11.—"Now is our *salvation* nearer than when we believed"—been used to prop up unbelief, in the erroneous thought that in no sense can the soul realize salvation as a present thing until the close of one's earthly history!—ignoring such a statement as, He "*hath saved us*, and called us with an holy calling." (2 Tim. i. 9.) And worse still, by such an applica-

tion of the above scripture, believing is slighted, as if it merely formed one of a series of virtues, which qualified the soul to *hope for* mercy and salvation by-and-by. Many will also recall the mischief done by applying Phil. ii. 12.—“Work out your own salvation”—to the case of such as are trusting to their own merits and activity for deliverance from the wrath of God. In truth, neither one scripture nor the other applies to the unsaved at all; for in both cases they are saints who are addressed—*believers* at Rome in one instance, and *believers* at Philippi in the other—as the context, especially the address in the first chapter of each epistle, plainly shows the matter referred to in God’s grand design to have those addressed perfectly like His Son, consummated at His coming. The consummation itself is particularly in view in Rom. xiii.; and the process leading to that issue in Phil. ii. Here God is seen as the divine operator, and *the saints* are besought to act in consort with Him to the desired end. It will be seen then, from the scriptural use of the term *salvation*—its application alike to the past, the present, and the future of believers—that nothing is more foreign to God’s thoughts than the ultimate perishing of a single partaker of that precious gift. Indeed, Rom. viii. 30 clearly negatives such a supposition: “Whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified.” “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” Therefore, those called, effectively of course, may be quite certain of glory to come—“the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Thess. ii. 14.) And this is *salvation*, as we see in verse 13—the simple means of obtaining it being “the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” Note the order here; it is the

same as that in which the apostle Peter also presents these operations. (1 Peter i. 2.)

Salvation then is what God is about soon to display in its fulness and glory—so far, at least, as it *can* be *displayed*—having conformed us to “the image of His Son.”

Is this your hope, my reader? It is well-nigh vain your proceeding further with this study if you have not yet found how you stand with God in respect of your nature and your history. Have you yet learned your *nature* merits only wrath? Do you know your *sins* are so heinous that the blessed Son of God had to drink the bitter cup to render your salvation possible? It is to such as *fear God* that the word of His salvation is sent. (Acts x.) And if you are one of those who have discovered their deep, deep need of the Saviour's atoning work at Calvary, to you “forgiveness” and “justification from all things” are freely offered in His precious name. (Acts xiii. 38, 39.) The knowledge of salvation may be yours *now* by the remission of sins. (Luke i. 77.) “*Now is the day of salvation.*”

Glory with Christ, conformity to His image, is our crowning portion. It is not the *crown* yet, however; but a cross for earth, and armour for the heavenlies *now*, with “the *hope* of salvation” as a *helmet*. (1 Thess. v. 8; Eph. vi.) We linger, according to the will of God, in a scene where each step forward begets fresh need, need too for *divine* intervention; for we are worse than weak. Thanks be to God, that intervention is assured to His own in full knowledge of what they are, and is of the most definite and adequate character. Thus, if it be “with fear and trembling” we are enjoined to “work out our salvation,” we are also assured, “It is God that worketh in us both *to will* and *to do* of His good pleasure.”

If we bend, in the becoming expression of real dependence upon God, in prayer, "the Spirit helpeth our infirmities." "He maketh intercession for the saints according to God," so that we may "pray in the Spirit." And the blessed Lord Himself "*ever liveth to make* intercession for us," so that "He is able to save them to the uttermost." (Heb. vii. 25.) Indeed, it is on this matter the Holy Ghost uses, so to speak, an *a fortiori* argument: "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, *much more*, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

The wonderful encouragement saints have in such assurances may be gathered by connecting the following scriptures:

In John xxvii. the Lord was about to leave this scene for the Father's house, and knowing how "His own" would be circumstanced, He prays the Father to *keep them in His own name*, giving us a precious insight into the nature, substance, and aim of His present intercession on high. 1 Peter i. 4, 5, beautifully gives the result of this intercession. Not only is the inheritance reserved for the saints, but *they are kept* by the power of God unto salvation ready to be revealed.

On their side is dependent faith—committing "the *keeping* of their souls to Him in well-doing" (1 Peter iv. 19); while the affections are engaged with the blessed Lord Himself, their natural object, as Christians—"Whom having not seen, ye love." As a result they "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory," and thus even now participate in the blessedness of salvation, the consummation of which we wait for. How blessed to be *thus* kept and cared for! "Happy are the people that are in such a case!"

J. K.

SCRIPTURE NOTES.

I.

“Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.”—DEUT. xxxiii. 25.

THERE is probably no scripture quoted more frequently than this, and certainly none more commonly used for comfort and encouragement to the feeble and aged; but the question has often been raised as to its application to the saints of this dispensation. More attention to its place and context would soon give the rightful answer. It occurs in the blessing of Asher, and it contains, therefore, for him—*i.e.*, for the tribe—what it could not contain for us. But, like the infinite fulness of the word of God, it contains for us what it could not bestow on Asher. It runs, “Let Asher be blessed with children [*i.e.*, have a fruitful progeny]; let him be acceptable to his brethren [be in their favour or esteem], and let him dip his foot in oil”—a desire doubtless for his wealth in the produce of the olive. Then follows the promise at the head of these notes. Now it is precisely in this connection, between the last clause of verse 24 and verse 25, that the truth for Christians is to be found. Oil is a well-known type of the Holy Spirit. Taking it thus all is plain. Let the believer walk (dip his foot) in the power of the Holy Ghost, and *then* it may be said to him, “Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.” So understood, the promise is exceedingly beautiful. It points out that the only power for walk is the Holy Spirit, and that His

strength, however our natural powers may decline, will never fail. As thy days—long or short—so shall thy strength be, if thou dost but dip thy foot in oil.

E. D.

II.

EPH. ii. 13.

A SOUL in communion with the mind of God will always have a deepening apprehension of the value of the precious blood of Christ. While this is ever true, it is important not to lose sight of any part of the truth of God. Now in prayer and thanksgivings the expression is often heard, that "we who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." A single glance at the above scripture will show that this is only a part of the truth, and that a most weighty part in this case has been omitted. "But now," says the apostle, "*in Christ Jesus* ye who sometimes were far off," &c. It is not only, therefore, the efficacy of the blood to which reference is made, but also to the place of the Christian before God; viz., in Christ Jesus. There are the two things—our being in Christ, and the fact of being made nigh by His blood. Nor in the teaching of this epistle can these two things be dissevered, as "in Christ" is, if we may so term it, the keynote of the epistle. This is shown by chap. i. 3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." And this, we learn from the next verse, is in pursuance of God's eternal counsels; for it goes on to say, "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." From this we learn the necessity

of holding fast to our being "in Christ;" for in truth we have now no other standing before God. If not "in Christ," our standing would be in Adam, in the flesh; and on that footing God could not have anything to say to us, except indeed in judgment. From all eternity, therefore—before the responsible man, Adam, appeared on the scene—He chose us in Christ, the man of His counsels, thus purposing for us a place of everlasting security and blessedness in His own presence. But if He would have us before Him in Christ, He would also have us in a condition suited to the place; and therefore He has determined that "we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." As seen in chap. i. 3, every blessing is possessed in this epistle as being in Christ. It is thus in Him that we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins; in Him that we have obtained an inheritance, &c. (*vv.* 7–11.) How blessed then to know that before God we were always seen in Christ; that though, in the history of His ways, we were once in the flesh, Adam, as the expression of man in the flesh, has for ever found his end judicially in the cross of Christ. Our place, therefore, and our spiritual blessings, are now characterized by the position which Christ Himself occupies, as the glorified Man, in the presence of God.

It should be added, for the help of the reader, that "in Christ" has not the same meaning necessarily in all the epistles. The term must be interpreted according to its context, and according to the distinctive truth of the epistle in which it is found. To lose sight of this tends to obscure these characteristic differences, and thus to deprive the saints of some of the most blessed portions of their heritage.

E. D.

THE BOOK OF EZRA.

CHAPTER iii. 8-13.

IN this section the account is given of the actual laying of the foundation of the temple. An interval of at least seven months must be placed between verses 7 and 8. How it was spent is not revealed. The ostensible ground of the pause, before commencing the work of building, would seem from the connection to be waiting for the "cedar trees." However this might have been. "In the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the Lord." (v. 8.) Three things are to be noted in this statement. Whatever the state of the people at large, Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the governor and the priest, are foremost in the Lord's work. Officially at the head, they retain the spiritual lead of the people. Happy is it for the people of God in every age, when their leaders are in the secret of the Lord's mind, when they can call upon the people to follow them in His service. It is not always so: indeed, not infrequently the first action of the Spirit of God is in the midst of His people, and then the nominal leaders are set aside, or constrained to follow to preserve their place. Secondly, the governor and the priest know how to associate the people with

themselves in their sacred enterprise. This is the sure mark of spiritual power on their part, as well as a testimony to the fact that God was working with them. Thus far there were no schisms, but all were banded together by one common object. Lastly, we find that the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, were commissioned to set forward the work of the house of the Lord. This was evidently a recurrence to the scriptural order, arising out of a divine intelligence as to the nature of the work on which they were engaged. (See Numbers iv.; 1 Chron. xxiii. 24.) The maintenance of God's order in the work of His house is of the first importance, for it is in fact subjection to His will as expressed in His word. To man's thoughts some other method might have seemed preferable; but the only question for the Lord's servants was, and is, What has He directed? From not perceiving this, there has been perpetual conflict in the church of God between man's will and the Lord's; and, alas! the consequence has been that man and man's thoughts have almost universally usurped the place of Christ and His word.

The Levites through grace readily entered upon their labours. There were but seventy-four. (See chap. ii. 40.)* In the wilderness, comprising only those who were "from thirty years old and upward, even unto fifty years old," they numbered "eight thousand and five hundred and eighty." (Numbers iv. 46-48.) When the Lord therefore opened the door of deliverance for them from their Babylonish captivity, very few had

* The children of Asaph, and the children of the porters (ii. 41, 42), were also Levites. Altogether, therefore, they numbered three hundred and forty-one; but only these seventy-four were available for this special work.

cared to avail themselves of it; they had found a home, alas! in the land of their exile, and had forgotten Jerusalem and ceased to remember Zion. The more precious to the Lord was the fidelity of these seventy-four, and with His presence and blessing they were enough for His service as overseers of the workmen in the house of God. Grace too had wrought in their hearts, for they stood "together," or, as the margin reads, "as one" in their office. This was true fellowship, and sprang from the fact that they were in communion with the mind of God concerning His house. His objects were theirs, and hence they were not hampered by divided counsels; but "as one" they set forward the workmen. Blessed augury for the success of their enterprise, as well as the evident fruit of the action of the Spirit of God!

The next two verses describe the celebration of the laying of the foundation. "And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David, king of Israel. And they sang together by course, in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord, because He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid." (*vv.* 10, 11.) It was a day of great joy and gladness; and as they had gone back to the word, "as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God," for directions concerning the altar, the sacrifices, and the feasts, they have recourse to "the ordinance of David, king of Israel," for guidance in their service of praise. (Compare 2 Chron. v. 12, 13.)

In the wilderness indeed we do not read of songs of joy; they had sung the song of redemption on the banks of the Red Sea, but even that soon died away on their lips, and was succeeded by the murmurs which were begotten by the hardships and perils of their pilgrim journey. But when in the land the ark had found a resting-place, if but for a time, in Zion, David "appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, and to record, and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel." Also Asaph and others were to play upon psalteries and harps, Asaph himself was to make a sound with cymbals, while certain priests were to blow with trumpets. "On that day David delivered first the psalm, to thank the Lord, into the hand of Asaph and his brethren," in which the words occur, "O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever." (1 Chron. xvi.) Few and feeble therefore as were the children of Israel who gathered this day on mount Moriah, they were scrupulously exact in obedience to the Word. Engaged on the Lord's work, they discerned rightly that in it human thoughts and human wisdom had no place. The Lord and the Lord alone must prescribe the method of His house.

Three classes are distinguished in this joyful celebration: there were the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the sons of Asaph with cymbals; and there were outside of these the people who answered the praise they heard with a great shout, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. None but priests were permitted to blow with the sacred trumpets (see Numbers x.), for it needs to be in the holy place, in the presence of God, in communion with His

mind, to discern when to sound the notes of testimony and praise. So likewise only the sons of Asaph—Levites, “according to the king’s order”—must use the sacred cymbals. (1 Chronicles xxv. 6.) Thus duly arranged, “they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord,” and the burden of their song was, “Jehovah is good, for His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel.”

But there were tears of sorrow mingled with their notes of praise; for the next verse tells us of many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, those who had seen Solomon’s temple in all its glory and splendour, and as they contrasted it with the house they were now commencing, they wept with a loud voice, while the others shouted aloud for joy. And truly the tears of the one and the gladness of the other befitted the circumstances of the day; for those who had seen the glory of the kingdom and the visible cloud of the presence of Jehovah in the first temple, and who were now spectators of the desolations of Jerusalem, and felt their present impoverished condition, and their feebleness in attempting to build anew the house of the Lord, it was but natural, whatever their gratitude, that grief should predominate. For those, on the other hand, who remembered only their captivity in Babylon, with its deprivation of both altar and temple, it could be nothing but unmingled gratitude and praise.

And who can doubt that both the tears and the gladness were alike acceptable to the Lord, inasmuch as both might equally have been the fruit of the working of His grace in their hearts? Indeed, might not a parallel be found in our own times? When

the Lord brought some of His people out of their Babylonish captivity, in the present century, and they entered anew upon the possession of their priestly privileges of access and worship; when they marked out again from the Word the true ground of the church, and sought in whatever feebleness to occupy it, their hearts, under the power of the Holy Ghost, would of necessity overflow in thanksgiving and praise. Now delivered from sacerdotal assumptions and claims, from the corruptions of the church and of Christianity, and filled with gratitude to Him who in His grace had opened their eyes, smitten off their fetters, and brought them into this wealthy place, they could but "shout aloud for joy." On the other hand, when the ancient men, who were more deeply instructed in the Word, and who had often pondered upon the beauty and order of the church in Pentecostal days, compared it with their own feeble efforts to conform themselves according to the directions of the Scriptures, and when they reflected how many of their brethren had been left behind in bondage, sorrow was as appropriate as joy. There could not but be the blending of the two, so that, as in the case of the children of Israel, there might have been a difficulty in discerning "the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people."

Altogether the celebration of laying the foundation of the temple is a beautiful scene. The reader, however, will remark that, in accordance with the nature of the book and the position of the people, the record is wholly taken up with what the people did and felt. God is not visibly in the scene, though it is apparent that all is being done for and to Him. In a word, His

people are acting in faith, and faith only could bring Him in, and that of necessity was an individual thing. But we are not left without witness of God's thoughts of His people on this day. If we turn to the book of Zechariah, we shall find that He was watching His people, and interested in their doings. As yet God had not begun to speak by prophecy to His restored people, either by Haggai or by Zechariah; but when He, some years later, stirred them up and encouraged their hearts by this means, He refers to the laying of the foundation of the temple. Zechariah thus speaks: "The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth." (Chap. iv. 8-10.)

We thus learn how precious to God was the commencement of His house. His heart was set upon it, and He ever rejoices when His people understand His thoughts, and, with intelligence of His mind, seek to be found in the path of His will. Zerubbabel had laid the foundation, and he also should finish it; and this should be a sign to the people that the Lord had sent His servant. It might be a day of small things, as measured by the outward eye; but it was a day which contained within itself the promise of the restoration of the kingdom in glory, under the sway of the promised Messiah (see Zechariah vi. 12, 13), and it was the privilege of faith to link itself, in this day of small things, with

the full accomplishment of the purposes of God towards His people. Moreover, the eyes of the Lord—"those seven," His perfect intelligence, and cognizance of all things; for they are the eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the whole earth—should rejoice, and see the plummet in the hands of Zerubbabel; *i.e.*, when His house should be completed. In the previous chapter these seven eyes are upon the foundation-stone. "Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, thou, and thy fellows that sit before thee: for they are men wondered at: for, behold, I will bring forth my servant, THE BRANCH. For behold the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes: behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree." (Chap. iii. 8-10.)

This scripture reveals to us the full significance in the thoughts of God of the laying of the foundation of His house by the remnant in Jerusalem. It was the assurance of the introduction of Christ, the Branch, who should secure to His people the promised blessing. So looked at, it is God that was doing all, if His people were the instruments. He laid the foundation-stone (compare Isa. xxviii. 16), though it were by the hands of Zerubbabel. It was His work, inasmuch as it was the fulfilment of His counsels. His eyes were upon the stone—that stone of grace and blessing; for indeed it was "a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation"—and He Himself would engrave the graving; that is, He would unfold and declare all its divine import; and then He would remove the iniquity

of the land in one day. For truly it was through His death and resurrection that Christ would become the Saviour of His people from their sins, and thus the foundation-stone on which His people should be built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (1 Peter ii. 4, 5), and on which His people Israel should also rest, and trusting in which they should never be confounded. The consequence therefore should be full earthly blessing, every man calling his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree.

Combining the above scriptures with the narrative in Ezra will enable the reader to view the proceedings of that day with a double interest. If in Ezra the Spirit of God would associate us with the thoughts and feelings of the people in connection with their work, in Zechariah He draws us into fellowship with the thoughts of God. The people, it may be, saw but little beyond the promise of the restoration of the temple and its services; but God, with whom a thousand years are as one day, beheld in that day of small things the commencement of His work of grace and power, in virtue of which He would accomplish all His counsels through the advent, death, appearing, and reign of His anointed—His King, whom He would one day establish on His holy hill of Zion.

E. D.

"WHERE CHRIST SITTETH."

SET your mind on things above,
 Where the Christ is seated,
 Who has died for us in love,
 And our foes defeated.

There, what eye hath never seen,
 Nor the heart conceivèd—
 What for us preparèd has been,
 Is to us revealèd.

There affections may outflow
 Unrestrained in measure ;
There the heart afresh may glow
 With unmingled pleasure.

There is Christ Himself to fill
 Every heart with wonder,
 Who once came to do God's will,
 And our chains to sunder.

Centre He, of glories there,
 Which no thought can measure ;
 Glories which we soon shall share,
 Whom He counts His "treasure."

Give Him what He values most—
 Deep and true affection ;
 Who redeemèd, at such a cost,
 Us from condemnation.

Now our life with Christ is hid,
 Safe in God's own keeping ;
 Fruit of what for us He did,
 We His saints are reaping.

When He comes in glory bright,
 We with Him appearing,
 Shine in all His heavenly light,
 This each heart is cheering.

Forward then, to see His face,
 We would still be pressing ;
 Walking here in truth and grace,
 Here His life expressing.

EXTRACT FROM LETTER.

“ISRAEL after their return from Babylon was Israel still. They had not the ark, the glory, nor the Urim, nor did they affect that to which such things were needed; but they fully recognized themselves as God’s Israel. As far as they could they did the services of such, and behaved themselves as such; but they never did anything in *any other character*, or what was *inconsistent with that character*. This is much to be remembered. Did they, I ask, bring home with them the customs of the heathen? ‘The latter house’ was not what ‘the former house’ had been, and the old men wept; but as far as conditions allowed it, the ways of the two houses were alike. They never brought in the customs of the heathen; and as simply and surely as ever they took knowledge of themselves as the Israel of God. Their circumstances were changed; they were in ruins. Their fair things and their honourable things were spoiled. They were subject to the Gentile, but they were Israel still. This was their principle, and accordingly as soon as anything was discovered inconsistent with that it was judged. You remember the case of intermarriages, and the more pertinent one of Nehemiah revenging the act of Eliashib, who prepared a chamber for Tobiah the Ammonite in the house of the Lord. They owned their circumcision, their separation to God, as jealously as ever. They refused Samaritan brotherhood and communion with the Gentiles, while they were debtors to the patronage of the Gentiles, and were partakers of their bounty. Horonites, Ammonites, and Moabites were the same to them as ever they had been. No glory had entered the latter house as it had the former. This may have tried their faith. The ark had not been preserved for

them as in another land of Philistines, nor had it returned to them as in victory from another temple of Dagon; it was lost to them. This may have tried their faith also. Nor had they their priest with Urim and Thummim. Thus were they in ruins, shorn of beauty and strength, and some of their brethren were still in Babylon. But in the presence and midst of all this, they avow themselves to be God's Israel as surely and simply as ever. They allow of nothing inconsistent with the former house, though they well knew, and were constrained to feel, that they had not all its glory in the latter house. This is for us, dear brother. We are in our way and measure to be 'stewards of the mysteries of God,' and that too under the holy sanction of being 'faithful.' And neither *love sake* or *brotherhood sake*, or any other impulse, is to prevail with us to forego the services which attach to so precious a stewardship. The peculiarities of the house of God are to be our peculiarities; and though we own Israelites in Babylon, we are not to own Samaritans or Chaldees in Zion; nor are we to own ways unworthy of Zion in a returned captive, though we see him the witness of ruins and weakness. This theme is worthy of our thoughts, and I confess I desire our dear brethren to take counsel upon it. . . . I own saints (to be sure I do) where I cannot see Church ruins; as, for instance, in the Establishment. The Establishment is not a Church ruin; it is an important thing in the earth, which must scorn the idea of ruins. Nay, it denies the Church in her very first element; for it has not gone to Christ as a stone 'disallowed of men,' but has linked His name with the government and men of the world, but God's dear people are there. But even when an assembly is not of that earthly and important character, and takes a lowlier bearing, yet it may not be a Church ruin, I must still inspect it whether or not it own the peculiarities of the house of God. Christendom is not to be mistaken for Church ruins. . . . The few who call on the

Lord out of a pure heart form the Church ruins (2 Tim. iii.), where I must be found. And it is a holy question for us, beloved, Are we upholding merely Christian fellowship? or are we dwelling according to the holiness of God within the precincts of a Church ruin? . . . It is needful to remember with increased care that the truth of God and the house of God have their blessed peculiarities; that not one of them is to be sacrificed to the morals, the politics, or the religion of man; and that we are not to mistake for them what man produces, be it as good as it may. *Ruins are weak things, but still they tell of the original building.* And so in our present weakness, we must still tell of the peculiarities of the Church. In the truth or mysteries witnessed by us, in the nature, subject, and purpose of our discipline, in the ways and ordinances of the assembly, in the whole process of our common edification, the peculiarities of the house of God must be seen. I avow ruins as simply as ever; but if it be necessary, I add that they are *Church* ruins, unlike either the old Roman temple or the buildings of the philanthropists and reformers of this our day.

J. G. B."

"December 18th, 1849."

A WORLDLY religion, in which the world can walk, and in which the religious element is adapted to man on the earth, is the denial of Christianity.

HE who seeks to be great, and to take the lead among Christians, has entirely falsified the Christian character. He will be the last of all; and the true way of having the highest place is to serve, considering oneself the slave of the wants of other disciples.

MEDITATIONS ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

CHAPTER VIII. (vv. 20-39.)

THUS peace is made; our sins are put away, we have a new life, possess the earnest of the Spirit, the glory is before us in hope, and we shall be like the Lord. But as long as we have not reached the glory, we groan with the creation. Linked by our bodies to the fallen creation, we feel, whilst realizing our glorious hope, the sad condition of the whole creation. Free before God, free from the law of sin and death, filled with the hope of glory, we are brought, through the knowledge of the glory, and of the perfect deliverance of the creature, to utter groans which are the expression of *their* groans to God. But our groaning is not a complaint, the fruit of discontent, but the operation of the Holy Spirit in the heart. The Spirit directs our eye to the glory, where we shall have no more cause to groan; and makes us feel according to the love of God, the suffering of an enslaved creation; we feel with it, because as to our bodies we still belong to it. The Spirit of God which dwells in us forms these feelings according to God. God searches the heart of man, and He finds this operation of the Spirit in the heart of a Christian who is delivered. The Spirit itself is the source of divine sympathy with a groaning creation. (v. 27.) The Christian's gaze will be directed, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, to the glory on high and the rest of God, where all is blessing. He joyfully realizes what is before him. Yet, as he is

still in the body, he feels all the more the condition of a fallen creation—shares its groans—and thereby becomes the voice of a groaning creation before God. But his groans go up in the Spirit of love, according to God, because he himself is in perfect freedom of relationship to God. With regard to his condition, he is saved in *hope*; but before God his heart is free in the sense of His love. He can rejoice in hope—the hope of glory; his conscience is perfect; the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost. And thus according to this love he can sympathize with the universal misery around him. True he does not know what remedy to ask for; perhaps there is none. But love can express the needs, and that according to the operation of the Spirit; and although the Christian does not know what he should ask for, He who searcheth the hearts finds the mind of the Spirit in their groans; for it is the Spirit which in the bottom of the heart gives expression to the feeling of need. Being ourselves still in the body, and as to our own condition forming part of the groaning creation and awaiting the redemption of our bodies, our sympathy is the more heartfelt.

But although we often do not know what we should ask for, yet there is one thing that we know perfectly; namely, that God makes all things work together for good to them that love Him, to them who are the called according to His purpose.

What a privilege is ours through grace—a privilege that we enjoy through the Holy Ghost; we are children of God, we know our relationship to God, and can realize it through the Holy Ghost; we cry, “Abba Father!” are children, and then heirs—heirs of God,

and joint-heirs with Christ. The Spirit reveals to us our inheritance, and gives us to enter into what it is. We shall be like Christ in the rest of God, and in His own rest; we shall be perfectly to the glory of Christ, and shall reign with Him over all things. As men on the earth our gaze is turned towards the glory of God, which is our hope, and which we shall share with Christ there, where all is pure according to the purity of God. When we look at this poor world, our hearts are full of the love of God in which we share the sufferings of an undelivered creation, and that according to God; so that He who searches the hearts finds therein the mind of the Spirit, which produces in us this sympathy with the sufferings of fallen creation in order that we in our groaning may be the mouthpiece of creation before God. And whilst from our lack of intelligence we do not always know what we should ask for, the word of God comforts us with the assurance that God, according to His own will and His own love, makes all things work together for our good.

This leads the apostle to say a few words as to the counsels of God, although this is not the subject of the epistle. He does so only to show the foundation of all blessing. Otherwise the epistle treats, as already remarked, of man's responsibility, as well as of the grace and the work of God to save us from the consequences of this responsibility.

God is ever acting in behalf of those who are called, for they are foreknown, and whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son. "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified." All is

grace, and therefore all is secure. Thus God does not close the series of His gracious instructions until the end is reached; the activity of God's grace does not cease until the called are *glorified*. The whole teaching of the gospel leads us back to God and His thoughts, which never fail, and cannot be hindered. And here we find, His name be praised for it, that *God is for us*. The apostle develops his doctrine in verses 31-39. The proof of God's being for us may be gathered, first, from what He gives, then that He justifies us, and finally, that nothing can separate us from His love. This is the blessed conclusion of the whole teaching of the epistle, "God is for us;" it is the source of blessing; it is the conclusion the heart draws from all that is here revealed to us of Him. Not only has the *righteousness* of God been glorified and satisfied in the work of Christ, but we also see that God's *love* is the source of all; and this changes all our thoughts with regard to God. It was just on this point that the teaching of the reformers of the sixteenth century was defective. Far be it from me to wish to depreciate the worth of these men. No one could be more thankful for the deliverance from superstition which has accrued to us through the Reformation; no one could more highly appreciate than I do the faith of those who have willingly sacrificed even their lives for the truth. Indeed it would be impossible for me now quietly to write of the defect in their teaching had they not joyfully given up their lives for the maintenance of the truth. Nevertheless the truth in the word of God remains ever the same. The reformers taught, it is true, that Christ had done all that was requisite to satisfy the righteousness of God, but not that the *love of God* had given the Lamb, His own Son, to accomplish

the work. According to them, God was ever the Judge, reconciled indeed to us by the work of Christ, but not known as the One who loved us whilst we were yet sinners. In John iii. 14 the Lord says, "The Son of man *must* be lifted up," for God is a holy and righteous God. Then in verse 16 follows the *motive* of all: "For *God so loved* the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." The practical consequence of the teaching of the reformers was perhaps entirely unknown and undesired by them; namely, that love is in *Christ*, and that God is on the judgment-seat as an austere Judge. But "*grace reigns through righteousness.*" (Rom. v. 21.) In the day of judgment *righteousness* will reign. Love has firmly established the righteousness of God in Christ in our favour. Righteousness was needed; love has provided it.

Thus we know that God is for us according to His infinite love, and according to His eternal and immutable righteousness. The first proof of this is that He has not spared His own Son, but has given Him up for us; "how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Yes, we can count on Him to give us all that is good; but how can He, the Holy One, be *for* us in view of our *sins*? It is just there that we have seen how fully He is for us, for He has given His Son even for our sins. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" God Himself has justified us, who will condemn us? We may observe that all is here attributed to God. It does not say, we are justified *before* God, but "God that justifieth;" so that the apostle may well exclaim, "Who is he that condemneth," whoever it may be?

Then he changes somewhat the form of the proposi-

tion. He must think of Christ, and through Him he sees also that all the *difficulties of the way* disappear. Not as if they did not exist, they are there; but they disappear because Christ Himself has passed through every difficulty. In love become a man, He has experienced all the trials of the way, all human sorrow, all that in which the enemy has sought to obstruct the faithful servant of God in the path of holiness, even unto death. Thus we overcome, not merely through His well-proved strength, but we *experience His love* in a special manner. The sufferings are the pledge of a better glory; and whilst as *Man* He has suffered all, as *God* He has thereby proved His infinite love, and we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

In every respect God is *for us*. Precious truth! He has given His own Son, He will give us *all things*. He Himself has justified us, who will condemn us? And nothing can separate us from the love thus proved. All that is against us on the road to the glory cannot, as being of the creature, be greater than He who is Lord of all. God is for us in Christ, who has overcome all. The *proof* of His love is found not only in the path which He trod as Man to be able to suffer, and as God in order to reveal perfect love in the suffering; but, following Him in this path, we also *experience His love*. Nothing can separate us from it. J. N. D.

THE love of Christ is a love which is above all our wretchednesses, but which adapts itself to all our wretchednesses, and which is not repelled nor chilled by any of these wretchednesses.

CHRIST IN LUKE'S GOSPEL.

LUKE v. 36 ; vi. 1-23.

ALL, I suppose, realize that what is of ourselves must be put on one side. And I think I may say more: there is not one single bit which we ever receive into our souls of Christ that is not at the expense of what is of ourselves being judged and put on one side. We may learn about Christ many a thing very honestly and sincerely, and yet owing to the condition of our souls—something of the old man, some root of self not judged and given up—we are not able to profit and take up the truth that we may sincerely have learnt.

I.

CHRIST AS THE SON OF MAN.

What I desire is to trace the blessed Lord Jesus Christ as He is presented to us in this gospel, as the Son of man come down here—a new kind of Man in this world altogether, totally different from all others. If I turn, for instance, to chap. ii., in the very growing up of the Lord we see that there is a different Person in the world. As we grow up, we grow up in sin. I knew more sin at seven than I did at four; more at twenty than I did at ten. God may come in in grace and convert us early; but the moment we see the blessed Lord we see a vessel filled with grace. "The grace of God was upon Him." It was the first time it ever could be so said. God had given a measure of grace to one and another, but for the first time He

looked down on a perfect vessel of His grace. In John i. 14 we read, "Full of grace." That grace instantly began to display itself, but we see how little man was able to hold it. A system of things that was legal and adapted to man in the flesh could not hold the grace; it was impossible. So we get early in Luke the angels saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and upon earth peace." In chap. xii. it is, "Think you that I am come to give peace on earth?" But is not that what the angels said? A verse or two before, "I am come to send fire on the earth?" Then, if we go on to chap. xix., when the disciples spread their garments in the way and shout Hosannah, we get, "Glory to God in the highest, peace in heaven." The thing was, peace came, but the son of peace was not here. The Lord told His disciples to say, "Peace be to this house." If the son of peace was not there, it should return to them. The Lord came bringing peace into this scene, and the son of peace was not here, so His peace returned to Him; that is, so far as man in the flesh was concerned, or the system of things which would have blessed man in the flesh, if it were possible. In the early part of the chapter He is preaching the Word. He came not only to heal men's bodies, but to deal with their souls. There was moral power too in what he did. In the end of the chapter He brings this truth simply and plainly before us—the new will not fit in with the old. There was a new order of things presented in His person; but man had no relish for it. It could not be put together with the old; and secondly, man had no heart for it, "he saith the old is better." He prefers the things according to the flesh, whether religious or not, therefore he won't have the new wine.

II.

THE NEW WINE.

To go on to chapter vi., there we find the Lord setting aside the sign of the covenant between Jehovah and the children of Israel. He has brought in the new wine: the grace of God was presented to man in His person. Not merely could he say, "I am come as the messenger of grace," but He was the channel of it. It was come in Him. People would not have the Lord. In John vi., where He speaks of the bread that came down from heaven, they say, "Lord, evermore give us this bread;" but the moment He says, "I am the Bread of Life" they will not have Him, they look at Him as the carpenter's son. But the Lord having come to take up any poor ruined sinner, we see Him in the previous chapter calling Levi, and Levi enters into what the Lord's mind is; and he makes a feast for the Lord, and invites the very people the Lord wanted. There is a *full* river of grace flowing *now*, and the Lord wants vessels for the grace to flow into. Levi brought together the vessels for the grace that was then flowing into company with the Lord. That leads to the murmuring of the Pharisees, which brings out that man's heart has no taste for what there is in Christ. That leads on to chapter vi., where the Lord virtually sets aside the sabbath, the sign of the covenant between God and the Jews. He says, in Ezekiel xx., "I gave them my sabbaths to be a sign between me and them." The Lord now sets it aside. They could not eat of green ears or parched corn until the wave sheaf had been offered (Lev. xxiii. 14); and they were allowed to pluck the ears as they passed through the standing corn

of a neighbour. (Deut. xxiii. 15.) This the disciples were doing. The Lord of heaven and earth was here, and His disciples were passing along hungry. He was the rejected One, and instead of receiving tribute from those who were His subjects, they suffered those attached to Him to hunger. They were ready to stand upon the outward form, as the flesh always is; but God delights in mercy and not sacrifice. They knew not what was in God's heart, nor did they realize that the Lord Jesus Christ was the expression of what was in that heart down here. The Lord takes His place here as the Son of man, because everything in title is put under Him as Son of man, consequently He is Lord of the sabbath. He sets it aside. What it meant was, that He was setting aside the system of things which was found to be faulty. The new wine could not flow into the old vessel, nor the new piece be put on the old garment. He sets aside Judaism.

III.

THE MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND.

We pass on a little further, and then it is another thing. It is not the disciples this time. When they were in question, He appeals to what David did when he was a rejected king; but now it is a poor son of want and woe in the synagogue. They watch Him. Is it not strange that the heart of man is against the grace of God? Anything rather than grace, than that the heart should open itself and let the grace of God flow in. The Lord knew their hearts; He knew what was in man. He then bids the man rise up and stand forth in the midst. What a wonderful moment! The Lord in this scene, sorrow and sin and misery in it; and in

the synagogue too, where what God was should be taught to His people, "I am Jehovah that healeth thee."

They had no idea of who Jehovah was, no idea of the One whom Jehovah had sent; therefore when the Lord puts the question which was simply, "Is it proper and right to do good, or to do evil?" they did not answer Him. He heals the man, and "they were filled with madness, and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus." Grace is working, and instead of welcoming it, "they were filled with madness," and communed what they might do. The presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in this world made every thing manifest. In the beginning of the gospel Simeon says, "That the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." (Chap. ii. 35.) The Lord Jesus comes into this world, presenting grace in all the tenderness of man, in the perfection of a man, in such a way that in the next chapter a poor woman that was a sinner was allowed to wash His feet with her tears. That was Jesus in this world, the vessel of the grace of God here. In Luke He is not so much looked at as in John—the manifestation of what God is; the full development of the grace of the Father's heart, beautiful as it is. But He is presented as a man, in such a way that we can be near to Him. As the hymn says—

"That Thou might'st with us be."

So that a poor woman could touch Him; that Levi could make a feast, and invite a number of poor sinners to come and sit down with Him; that He could wander with His disciples through the cornfields, while they plucked the ears of corn, and did eat. A heart touched with the want and woe all round, yet man's heart thoroughly against Him. That is what was on earth;

the whole thing is thus portrayed. The sabbath, besides being a sign between God and Israel, was also the sign of God's rest in His own creation. He made every thing very good, and He rested. He brought man into His rest. It was all broken up directly, we know; but He brought man in to enjoy it. The sabbath was a sign of the goodness of God. Gen. ii. tells us, that before there was a man to till the ground the Lord God caused every thing to grow. It was God's delight to prepare that place for the creature to be put into. The sabbath was expressive of His delight in what His own hands had done, yet to be realized in the millennial sabbath. (Psalm civ. 31.) He thus presented Himself to His people of old as the Fountain and Source of all good, that man might come and enjoy what God is, and know what flows from God to His creature. The new creation in its fulness will be a scene where God Himself will fill every bit of His own creation—"God all in all." Yet evil man turned Him out of His creation, and crucified the Lord of glory. There is not a time when we look for anything in ourselves, instead of drawing every spring of our life from Him, that we are not slighting our blessed Saviour.

The sabbath was the sign of all this to His people. What people were like Israel, whom God had taken to be His own inheritance? So He says, in Isaiah lviii., "If thou turn away thy foot from doing thine own pleasure, and call the sabbath a delight." Instead of a man doing his own work to satisfy himself, if he kept the sabbath the Lord says, "Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord . . . and I will feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father." I know that is only earthly blessing; but what is it *now*, when I become a

vessel of grace? There was this vessel of grace flowing out in this weary world, addressing itself to man's heart in the most tender manner, so that any poor son of want and woe could understand it.

The Lord was born so poor in this world that there never was a poor man who could say, "I cannot go to the Lord, because He is above me;" that is, as to position in this world. Pride of heart does not like it to be so; but whatever the want I have I can come to Him, and there is the heart that made itself the vessel of every woe. As it says, "Himself bare our sicknesses, and carried our sorrows." That is what Jesus was in this world, and the heart of man would not have Him.

IV.

THE NEW ORDER OF MINISTRY.

I ask you to look at a verse or two more. Verse 12. I do not say much on that; but it seems beautiful to see the Lord going out and spending all night in prayer to God while moving about in service down here as the full channel of God's grace. He has communion with God about the whole scene He was in. I hesitate to say much, for it is treading on holy ground—how His heart breathed out all that it knew into the ear of God, what it felt as the channel of the want and woe around. Then, coming back into service, He brought from God, because He was the dependent Man (I say it with reverence), the divine communications, according to which He acted. We know that He had His ear opened morning by morning. Thus all He did as the dependent Man was done perfectly, according to His Father's mind, according to the will of God. Everything was told to God in prayer, and the actings of grace were

from the very heart of God. This marked the path of the Lord Jesus. Having spent the night in prayer, when it was day He called unto Him His disciples. (v. 13, 16.) We now get the new order of ministry, Judaism being set aside as a vessel unfit to hold the new wine. The Lord ordains new ministers. The temple and the synagogue services, the scribes and Pharisees, could not be ministers of this grace which was now flowing; therefore the Lord sets it aside, and chooses new instruments. He chose twelve, the perfection of administration in man, because this grace of God was to flow through a full channel—those that had tasted the grace themselves. He calls them apostles. They are commissioned that they might go out and minister this grace. Thus we get the vessels of the new wine; the Lord chooses them, "that they might be with Him" (Mark iii. 14), and carry out the grace to others. Verse 17. He stood in the plain, more properly a plateau. He takes His place with His chosen ones, and stands there now with them, and a company of people from all parts around Him; and then we get the beautiful character of the new thing—the new wine is flowing out. "The whole multitude sought to touch Him; for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all." What a sight to see in this world! Here was the One that the synagogue rejects, the One they are filled with madness about, the One who has been all night in communion with God, the perfect Man.

Then "He lifted up His eyes upon His disciples." (v. 20.) Not only does the new wine flow out and gladden weary hearts, while words of love and mercy fall upon their ears, or virtue went out and healed

them ; but we have now what it was to be brought into companionship and association with Him. His eyes are bent upon His disciples, and what does He say to His companions? "Blessed, blessed!" I may know what poverty is, or hunger, but if in His company, He says "blessed." The synagogue, the established religion does not know it. Laodicea may be increased with goods, and have need of nothing ; but to choose the company of Christ is to give up in this world. But what is it to find? What can we say we have found in His company? Have we heard Him, as it were, say, with His eyes bent upon us, "Well, if you are in my company, you are poor perhaps, and hungry, and weeping now, but you are blessed." Laodicea rejoices now, laughs now. The great effort of the present day is to set up the first man again, to reinstate and improve him. Thus Christ is not expected ; for if you can set up the first man, you don't want Christ to come. But if you feel the whole scene is a wilderness, you say, "Never till I am with Him shall I know fulness of joy." In spirit we enter into it now. When our hearts get into His presence we do know something of what fulness of joy means, that in His presence there is something that satisfies ; and the more we find it, the more our hearts go after it. There is plenty to dishearten if we think of what we find in ourselves and around us ; but this is a comfort, that every little taste the Spirit of God gives us of Christ leads us to want more. It will be at an expense to ourselves. Perhaps I shall have to give up this or that—not in a legal sense—but I shall find that this or that hinders my having something more of Christ. It may be a struggle ; but when we have found it we shall say, "There is something in

Christ so precious, it is worth giving up something that I may get it." Blessed poor! Whose lips are saying it? They are in company with Jesus. So on the mount of transfiguration. They are down with their faces to the earth, and when they look up they see Jesus only. God fixes our eyes and hearts upon the Lord Jesus Christ. Here the Lord bends His eyes upon them. It is wonderful to think of the Lord's eyes bent upon us, and His lips uttering such words. Does it come home to our hearts, "Blessed are ye"?

We have thus really the principles of Philadelphia and Laodicea. Philadelphia is association with the Lord Jesus Christ, and a heart that won't be satisfied till He comes. And what then? The Lord says, "I have set before thee an open door." If that is what we have chosen, we shall find hearts somewhere or other to minister to. It may be necessary at times to stand for the truth; but we don't want to have our hearts down under the evil we may have to resist, but to have them in living association with Christ, so that the Lord may set before us an open door. We shall find it, saints poor and weary, if the Lord gives us to think of saints, or to carry the new wine to sinners, that their hearts may be filled with joy and gladness. T. H. R.

It is important to remark that worldliness, or any allowance of what is not of God, by a godly man, gives the weight of his godliness to the evil he allows.

THE tomb in which our sins are buried is the monument of the eternal favour of our God.

THE BOOK OF EZRA.

CHAPTER iv.

No sooner had the foundation of the temple been laid than adversaries appeared on the scene. It was so also in New Testament times; for wherever the apostle went, laying the foundation of the assembly, the activity of the enemy was excited. Hence his warning, "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. iii. 10, 11.) But as with Paul, so also with Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the enemy assumed the guise of friendship. "Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel; then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither." (*vv.* 1, 2.)

The reader is not left in doubt for a single moment as to the character of these would-be helpers of God's people in their work. The Holy Spirit tells us plainly that they were "the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin," although the words of peace were upon their lips; for He knew their hearts; their aims and ends. And indeed they betray themselves in the very words they used. It is ever so; for the mere professor cannot under-

stand the things of God. They say, "We do sacrifice unto Him" (God) "since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither." They revealed in this way their true origin; they were, by their own confession, not the children of Abraham, but Assyrians, and had therefore no claim to be of the children of Israel. These were, in fact, the fathers of the Samaritans (see 2 Kings xvii. 24-41) who continued, down to the very end of the Jewish economy, to seek to intrude themselves into the place of privilege and blessing. It was on this account, and because of the strife thereby engendered, that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. We may learn for ourselves from this incident the source of one of the gravest dangers in the work of the Lord. The kisses of an enemy are both deceitful and dangerous, though it seems so ungracious to refuse the proffered help of professed friends. The Church to her loss has not only forgotten this truth, but has also sought on system the aid of the world in her work. She has thus become both corrupt and corrupting, illustrating anew the old proverb, "The corruption of the best thing is the worst corruption."

Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and their fellow-builders, were endowed with divine perception, and so alive to the wile of the foe. They replied to this seductive offer, "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us." (v. 3.) It may seem to some that these leaders of the people were taking up a narrow and exclusive position, and in fact they were; but in so doing they had the Lord's mind, and were resting on a divine principle which still abides; viz.,

that only the Lord's people can be engaged in the work of His house. Others may call themselves builders, and profess a desire to help on His work, but they can only build in wood, hay, or stubble; and the apostle has uttered the solemn warning voice for all ages, "If any man defile" (corrupt) "the temple of God, him shall God destroy." (1 Cor. iii. 17.) No possible straits or difficulties, no circumstances whatever, can justify the alliance of the Church with the world, the acceptance of the world's favour or assistance in the holy work of the Lord. Not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world, it is to deny both our character and that of the world itself, if we break down the everlasting distinction between ourselves and it, which has been revealed in the cross of Christ. (See Gal. vi. 14; John xv. 18-21.)

The true nature of the offer these adversaries of Judah and Benjamin had made is seen by the effect produced by its refusal. For what do we read? "Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even unto the reign of Darius king of Persia." (*vv.* 4, 5.) Thus failing in their object of corrupting the work on which the children of the captivity were engaged, they now throw off the mask of friendship, and seek to hinder by open hostility. Such is Satan's method of proceeding in every age. He and his servants will often transform themselves into angels of light and ministers of righteousness, because it is easier to deceive than to deter the saints; but the moment his presence and activity is detected and exposed, his rage

is unbounded. How could he seek to advance the building of God's house? The foundation is Christ; "and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?" (2 Cor. vi.) But, alas! Satan in the case before us gained a temporary advantage; for through his machinations, working on the fears and the unbelief of the people, he succeeded in stopping the building of the temple, even until the reign of Darius, king of Persia.

It will be perceived that these two verses (4 and 5) are a summary of the activity of the foes of Israel during the reigns of Cyrus, Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes; and that therefore verse 24 is connected with verse 5, the intervening passage being a parenthesis which gives an account of the way in which the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin succeeded in their designs. Moreover it would seem, from a careful comparison of the prophecies of Haggai with this chapter, that the children of Israel ceased to build long before the prohibition was obtained; for it is evident from Haggai ii. 15, that they had made but little, if any, progress after the foundation was completed. Fear of their adversaries was stronger than their faith in God; and consequently losing heart, and thinking only of themselves and their own selfish interests, they began to build their own houses, and to say, "The time is not come that the Lord's house should be built." (Haggai i.) It is true that they were but a feeble remnant, and that their enemies were numerous and active; but they might have read, in one of their own Psalms, "When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear:

though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple." (Psalm xxvii. 2-4.) But, alas! our own hearts understand but too well both the weakness and the fear of these poor captives, and how easily we are disheartened by a demonstration of the enemy's power when we forget that, if God be for us, none can succeed in their designs against us, when, in other words, we walk by sight and not by faith. The failure of God's people in this chapter is therefore but the failure of His servants in all ages.

From verses 6-23, as already pointed out, we have the particulars of the way in which the adversaries of God's people secured a royal decree in their favour, and against the building of the temple. Their attempt in the reign of Ahasuerus seems to have failed (*v.* 6), but nothing daunted they persevered with their object in the reign of his successor, Artaxerxes, and then their efforts were rewarded.*

There are several points of instruction to be noted in the record of their proceedings. The first is the union of all the various races of the land "against Jerusalem." "Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the

* This is scarcely the place to discuss the question as to who were Ahasuerus and Artaxerxes. There is great difficulty in identifying them now with the monarchs of profane history. Probably the first was Cambyses or Xerxes, and the second the pseudo-Smerdis or Artaxerxes Longimanus. The reader may consult on the subject any good Bible dictionary.

Dehavites, and the Elamites. And the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnapper brought over, and set in the cities of Samaria" (*vv.* 9, 10)—all these were banded together to frustrate the work of the Lord in the building of His house. The carnal mind is enmity against God, and there is therefore no difficulty, when God and His testimony are in question, in securing unity of aim and purpose amongst His enemies. Differ as they may amongst themselves, and even hating one another, they have but one mind when God appears on the scene. This was remarkably illustrated in the case of our blessed Lord, when the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together, against Jehovah, and against His Anointed. (*Psalm ii.*) Even Herod and Pilate, who before had been at enmity between themselves, were made friends together by their common contempt of Christ. It was in this way that Satan was proved to be the god of the world, for he succeeded in uniting the highest and the lowest against the Son of God, and marshalling all together—Romans and Jews, the civil, the ecclesiastical, and the military authorities, as well as the common people—and he led on his army, animated by his own mind and spirit, to cut off Christ out of the land of the living. Once more in the world's history he will prove his power over the hearts of sinful men, but then to his own, and, alas! also to their everlasting destruction. (*See Rev. xix., xx.*) So in our chapter, Satan, though concealed, is the active agent in stirring up these various peoples in their action against the work of the remnant.

This is seen in the next point to be noticed. In the letter addressed to the king they say, "Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee

to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations." (*v.* 12.) This statement betrays the speech of the "accuser of the brethren;" for it was false, and proceeded therefore from Satan, for "when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it." So far indeed from having set up the walls and joined the foundations of the city, they had barely laid the foundation of the temple. And the reader will perceive that, though these "adversaries of Judah and Benjamin" had professed a desire to help in building the temple, on the ground that they also sacrificed to the God of Israel, they omit all reference in their accusation to the temple, and speak only of the city. Their reason was obvious. The proclamation of Cyrus was concerning the temple. If therefore they accused the Jews of building the city, they gave a colour to the charges of rebellion and treasonable practices which they insinuated; and from the king's answer it is clear that they had not miscalculated. (*vv.* 19, 20.)

Another point not to be passed over is, that the sin of Israel in the past bears bitter fruit for these children of the captivity. Their last king, Zedekiah, had "sworn by God" to be faithful to Nebuchadnezzar; but he broke his oath, and rebelled against the king of Babylon, and thus procured the destruction of Jerusalem, as well as incurred the judgment of God. (See 2 Chron. xxxvi. 13; Ezekiel xvii. 12-16.) There was truth therefore in the accusation that Jerusalem had been a rebellious city; so that while the remnant themselves were under the favour and protection of God, and no one could harm them as long as they went forward in confidence in Him, they now suffered, in His government in this

world, the consequence of the sins of their fathers. It is still to be emphasized that these adversaries could have had no power as against the people of God, if the people themselves had not lost faith in God and heart for their work. The apostle wrote, "A great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. xvi. 9); but not one of his opponents could have hindered his work, because he was counting on Him who "openeth, and no man shutteth." So had it been with the remnant but for their own sloth and unbelief; for, as already pointed out, they ceased, it would seem, from their work before the prohibition was obtained.

The two motives urged on the king were provision against future danger, and the possibility of loss of revenue. Thus appealed to, and the statements made concerning the character of the city in past days having been verified by the records in the royal archives, he wrote, "Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me. Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?" (*vv.* 17-22.) The adversaries were thus successful, and having received the letter, went up with all speed, armed with royal authority, and effectually provided against any attempt to continue the work of building Jehovah's house. They "made them cease," it says, "by force and power."

The chapter then closes with the statement, "Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia." (*v.* 24.) This last verse, however, connects itself with verse 5, and gives

the result of the enemy's opposition, of which verses 4 and 5 contain a general summary. The parenthesis gives the details of the way in which Artaxerxes was prevailed upon to issue his decree. Altogether it is a sad chapter—the account of the activity of Satan. The only bright gleam in it is the faithfulness of the leaders of Israel in refusing the alliance of the world. The rest of the chapter is darkness. God does not appear in it; and, looked at with human eyes, it would seem as if the enemy had completely conquered. While, however, God does not interpose, He is no uninterested spectator of what is taking place. Whatever His people were, He abides faithful; and we shall see that, though He will have His people thoroughly tested, He only waits for the proper moment to raise up a power which the enemy will not be able to withstand, and with which He will arouse His servants from their slumbers, and urge them onward in the prosecution of the object for which they had been brought back from Babylon.

E. D.

WHAT a poor thing is man! And we are weak in proportion to our importance before men. When we are nothing we can do all things, as far as human opinion is concerned. We exercise, at the same time, an unfavourable influence over others in the degree in which they influence us; in which we yield to the influence which the desire of maintaining our reputation among them exercises over our hearts; and all the esteem in which we are held, even justly, becomes a means of evil. Peter, who fears those that came from Jerusalem, draws away all the Jews, and even Barnabas, with him in his dissimulation.

SCRIPTURE NOTES.

I.

PSALM xvi. 2, 3.

THE connection between these two verses, as rendered in our English version, is confessedly obscure. The Lord, in His pathway through this world, taking as He ever did, in the perfection of His life of faith as man, the place of entire dependence and obedience, says, "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not unto thee;" and then the next verse proceeds, "But to the saints," etc., as if it meant, "My goodness extendeth not to thee, but to the saints," etc. Some years since a well-known servant of the Lord made a suggestion which, to most minds, cleared up the difficulty, besides throwing a flood of light upon the mind of the Spirit of Christ. Instead of reading, "But to the saints," etc., he pointed out, that to bring out the sense it might be thus taken, "*I have said* to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, In them is all my delight." This makes the parallelism also complete: "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord . . . but I have said to the saints." And the spiritual mind will instantly perceive the beauty of the passage as thus explained. There is first the lowliness of our blessed Lord as man; and secondly, there is His identification with, and delight in, the saints on the earth.

While, however, many were feasting on this precious unfolding of the Word, it was said, by one who claims to have a large knowledge of the original, that the structure of the Hebrew made this rendering impossible. But, on turning to the Revised Version, we find it thus

given: "I have said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord: I have no good beyond thee. As for" (or "unto" in the margin) "the saints that are in the earth, they are the excellent in whom is all my delight." Thus learning contradicts learning, and justifies the explanation of one who was not without learning, but who used it only as a servant in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord's heart, then, was upon the saints. It was in them He had His delight; and this He showed when He identified Himself with the poor remnant who went out to be baptized of John. (Matt. iii.) He Himself was also baptized; and it was then, on His going up out of the water, that the heavens were opened, and, together with the Spirit of God descending upon Him, there was a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight." He found His delight in the saints, and the Father found His delight in Him. It is surely a lovely scene; and we may learn that the heart of God can only flow out to His people through Christ, and that they can only meet the heart of God in the heart of Christ.

The reader may compare Prov. viii. 30, 31—"I was daily His delight . . . and my delights were with the sons of men." What wonders of grace, unfathomed and unfathomable, are contained in these few words!

E. D.

II.

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

GALATIANS VI. 2.

THE only question to be considered in this passage is as to the meaning of the law of Christ. It is generally said to be the law of love, and this is true; but is it not possible to be more precise? The preceding verse enjoins the spiritual to restore a fallen brother in the

spirit of meekness, "considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." That is, as we understand, the spiritual man, remembering his own liability to fall, is to go in all gentleness to him who has been "overtaken in a fault" or offence, and in grace so identify himself with his condition as to take his burden of sin and sorrow upon himself, with a view to his succour and restoration. Now this is exactly what Christ Himself has done—only perfectly—both in life and in death. Thus the evangelist says, "He cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." (Matt. viii. 1, 6, 17.) This was in His life, and concerning His death Peter says, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree." (1 Peter ii. 24.) He was thus, in life and death, the great burden-bearer; in life taking our infirmities and sicknesses in grace in order to remove them; in death bearing our sins in substitution, as made sin for us by God, when He endured for the glory of God all that was due to us on account of our sins, that He might take them away for ever. There is a great difference between His burden-bearing in life and in death; but still He was in both the burden-bearer. And this is the law of Christ: "Bear ye one another's burdens," and so fulfil the law of Him who was the pattern burden-bearer. Love was undoubtedly the motive of all; for, as the apostle says, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me;" and it is certain that we shall never go and take the burdens of our brethren on ourselves, unless we are under the constraint of the love of Christ. But this is motive, and the power, through the Holy Spirit, for fulfilling the law, rather than the law itself. E. D.

SAUL, DAVID, AND JONATHAN.

I SAMUEL.

THIS deeply interesting book gives us an eventful period in the history of Israel. The sad page recorded in the book of Judges had led to a change in the ways of God towards them. After the successive relapses which always followed the deliverances of the judges, God was pleased to raise up Samuel, who commenced the line of prophets by whom God addressed Himself to the conscience of the people, with a view to recall their hearts to Him; and the prophet henceforward superseded the priest as the medium of divine communication, in consequence of the utter failure of the priesthood in the person and family of Eli. Another change, too, takes place ere long in the mode of government of the people; namely, the anointing of a king. Hitherto God had kept the immediate government in His own hands; but the people, restless and dissatisfied—always ready to complain at the ways of divine goodness—ask for a king, that they may be like the nations round. Alas! they had lost the sense of what Jehovah was to them and of their own peculiar calling, or they never would have coveted to be like the surrounding nations. But the Lord, who always answers faith, is pleased at times to answer unbelief as well, as in the case of the quails; and so here He gives them their desire, and sets over them Saul, the son of Kish, the man of their desire, and who was so soon to represent the actual state of their hearts. Raised by God to a position of dignity and honour, Saul sits upon the throne of Israel,

the head and representative of the people. But what is his conduct in this place? Object of divine favour, he disobeys the word of the Lord who had thus blessed him, and by disobedience forfeits all. Chapter xv. records his fall; and Samuel, who had been the instrument of his anointing, is now sent to express God's judgment. "And Samuel said unto Saul . . . Thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." But no sooner have we this rejection and judgment of the disobedient man, than we read (chapter xvi. 1): "And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill thine horn with oil, and go; I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: *for I have provided me a king among his sons.*" This shows us that God has counsels, and provisions by which to accomplish them, entirely outside and independent of the fallen and disobedient man. There is one of whom it is written, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, who shall fulfil all my will;" and a little lower down in chapter xvi. we have the anointing of this chosen one, his setting apart for the great mission of fulfilling God's will.

In chapter xvii. the scene is changed. Israel, with its fallen king, stand face to face with the Philistines and their champion, Goliath of Gath; and all the host, from Saul the king to the meanest soldier, are full of fear and trembling, and none dare meet the foe; for God is not with them, and they have no confidence toward Him, as the apostle John speaks, "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." No; their heart did condemn them, and moreover God

was against them in judgment. The Philistines were His scourge for Israel's unfaithfulness; otherwise none of the inhabitants of the land could have stood before Israel. Who now can be for them, when God, their only Refuge, is against them? Now comes the occasion for unfolding and accomplishing the purposes of His grace. From the solitude of the sheepfold David is called by God to fulfil the great object for which he was anointed; and, as the obedient one, at his father's bidding, he carries the message to the camp. There he discovers the terrible strait of the people, and, impelled by holy zeal and fearless faith, he voluntarily offers to meet single-handed the dreaded foe. With a fixed heart and a firm step he descends the valley alone to grapple with the power of the enemy, and returns victorious, carrying back the giant's head—witness of his triumph. It is worthy of notice here, that whilst it is God's judgment that lay on the people for their sin and disobedience, it is God alone who can raise up and send the one who could meet that judgment, and deliver the people from under it. Nothing is now left but for Israel to pursue and gather up the spoil.

In all this solemn and touching incident we have given us in picture the great elements of the truth of the gospel. If I look at Saul in his first estate I see man raised up and blessed by God as at the beginning; then follows disobedience and the fall, man rejecting the word of the Lord, and the Lord rejecting him, as it is said of Saul, "I have rejected him;" and as the blessed Lord Himself said, when speaking of the cross, "Now is the judgment of this world;" and the apostle Paul, in 2 Cor. v., "If one died for all, then were all dead." We have thus in the cross of Christ not only

the condemnation of what the sinner has done, but the judgment of what he is; and thus I learn how entirely God has rejected the first man, and closed his history in the death of His Son, who was then bearing all the responsibility of the sinner, both as to guilt and nature. Mark the solemn words, "I have rejected *him*," or as the New Testament scripture puts it, "Our old man is crucified with Him;" so that my standing and place, and everything, as a man in the flesh, are gone, and if I have any place, as well as any life and nature, it must be in another; and I ask, In whom is it? The precious blood of Christ perfectly meets every question of my guilt, and enables God to be both just and my justifier; the death of Christ, too, is the condemnation of my state and status as a sinner, and is the end before God of all that I was. And now that God has raised Christ up from among the dead, and given Him, as man, the full answer of divine righteousness for all He had accomplished, it follows, in blessed sequence, that those *for whom* the mighty work was wrought should share in all that God thus gives him, just as Israel after the victory had been accomplished for them by the hand of David. In perfect love Christ entered into our place of condemnation as sinners, and now, by virtue of His work *wrought for us*, He brings us into His place of light and glory as man, setting us down before God and the Father in holiness and unblameableness in love, even in Himself, the Beloved, giving us His place there as truly as He once, in infinite grace, took ours here. Hence Scripture uniformly thus presents the Christian's present portion by the well-known words, "In Christ." It is vain to say that he is only "in Christ" for nature and life, and not for his position and acceptance; for if

such limitation were true, surely Scripture would have so stated it; but the Spirit's words are very plain, written for simple souls who are taught to believe that God means just what He says, when He tells us, again and again, that the believer is in Christ for righteousness, for sanctification, for all. His former position and state have been rejected by God, and in the death of Christ closed for ever. In His sight it has ceased to be; and now, as risen with Christ, the believer has an entirely new and heavenly position according to the value and efficacy of His perfect work, and he too has the Spirit of Christ given to dwell in him for power to walk worthily of the heavenly position in which he has been placed.

One word more as to the type. When David returned from the conquest all Israel celebrated his praise, and then hastened for the spoil; but in chapter xviii. we have something as instructive as it is beautiful. Another heart and eye had watched with deepest interest the stripling David go forth alone to the conflict. Tremblingly he had marked each step; and when David returns with the witness of his victory, what characterizes Jonathan is not so much elation at the victory as that his heart is arrested by the person of the one who has achieved it; and as he meditates on him, his affections are drawn out towards David. The thought of one who, unknown and unasked, could step into that terrible breach and face all the power of the enemy for him, so deeply affected him that, it is said, "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David; and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." This draws him near to David to seek his acquaintance, and the nearer he draws the more his heart is attached, for he finds his

love responded to, reciprocated, by his benefactor, and so they make a covenant together. Jonathan feels he would like to unite his interests with those of David; he wished to have nothing separate from him; and if he had anything, as the king's son, which distinguished him in the eyes of others, he stripped it from him to adorn David, "even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle." David evidently had not only won a victory over Jonathan's enemy, but also over Jonathan's heart, whose object now is to exalt his benefactor in the eyes of others. If we turn to the Philippians we find a man in a very similar state, for Paul had been so captivated by the glory of the Person of his Saviour, that he drops everything that once distinguished him in the eyes of others (chap. iii.), and declares (chap. i.) that his earnest expectation and hope are that Christ may be magnified in his body whether by life or by death.

May the Holy Spirit, whose mission it is to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us, so present Him to our hearts that we may be like Jonathan in this first attachment to David, but unlike him when he left his despised and rejected friend and saviour, and preferred the ease and comfort of his palace home, but only to perish with his disobedient father on mount Gilboa.

H. C. A.

IN a day of assumption both of knowledge and of place, it is well to remember that our blessed Lord characterised Himself as the One who was meek and lowly in heart.

INCREASING humility is a sure sign of growing conformity to the likeness of Christ.

THE BOOK OF EZRA.

CHAPTER V.

IN the last chapter we saw how the people were turned aside from their work by the activity of Satan. In the first two verses of this chapter we have the record of God's intervention, by His prophets, on His people's behalf, in order to overthrow the enemy's designs. The reader will recall the special position of these restored captives. Though brought back, in the mercy of God, to their own land, they could not have Jehovah's visible presence in their midst, as in the days of the kingdom; for He had transferred the sovereignty of the earth to the Gentiles. Fire no longer came down from heaven to consume their sacrifices, and even the priests were without the sacred Urim and Thummim. (Chap. ii. 63.) God therefore was now purely the object of faith, and the godly had to endure as seeing Him who was invisible. On this very account it was that God came in, not by any act of power to confound the adversary, but by the word of prophecy to reach the conscience of His people, and to stir them up to confidence in Himself; and thereby to strengthen them for the conflict which their labours would involve, as well as to assure them that as long as they trusted in Him the utmost efforts of their enemies would be in vain. And herein we learn the true function of the prophet. As another has said, "Prophecy supposes that the people of God are in a bad condition, even when they are still acknowledged and prophecy addressed to them. There is no need of addressing

powerful testimony to a people who are walking *happily* in the ways of the Lord, nor of sustaining the *faith* of a tried remnant by hopes founded on the *unchanging* faithfulness of God, when all are enjoying in *perfect* peace the fruits of His present goodness—*attached*, as a consequence, to the faithfulness of the people. The proof of this simple and easily-understood *principle* is found in each of the prophets." It should, *nevertheless*, be pointed out, that the prophet was raised up as the medium for communication with the people of *Israel* when the responsible head or heads of the *people* had failed. Thus when the priesthood had failed *under* Eli, Samuel was God's chosen vessel for His *message* to His people, and his ministry continued through the reign of Saul, or at least until David was *anointed* king. This explains the fact that the greatest of the prophets appeared on the scene at the darkest *periods* of the history of Israel, as, for example, *Isaiah* and Elisha. So in our chapter Zerubbabel, the *governor*, and Jeshua, the high priest, were the responsible heads of the captivity; but, worn out by the *harassing* attacks of their adversaries, they had also *separated* with the people, and had with them ceased to *build* the house of the Lord. God therefore now sent *prophets*, Haggai and Zechariah, and they "prophesied *unto* the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them." (v. i.)

As a matter of fact Haggai (as may be seen by a comparison of the dates of their respective *prophecies*, received his first message from Jehovah two *years* before Zechariah was employed, and it is *worthy* of notice as indicative of their failure that his first *message* was to Zerubbabel and Jeshua. (See Haggai 1:1, 2:1)

of the utmost importance (as shown in our exposition of Haggai) that the messages of the prophets should be read in connection with Ezra; for it is in these that the true condition of the people is discovered. It is evident that it was not only the fear of the enemy that led them to desist from their work, but that also their own hearts were settling down upon their own ease and comfort. They found time to build their own houses while saying, "The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." (Haggai i. 1-5.) Alas! how often is it the case that the people of God, forgetting that their citizenship is in heaven, and that therefore they are pilgrims, bend their efforts to build houses for themselves in a scene of death and judgment. So the children of the captivity, untouched by the desolations of Jehovah's house, lying waste as it was, turned aside to erect "ceiled houses" for themselves. But God was not indifferent to the state of His house, if they were, and he "blew upon" all the increase of the field because of His house that lay waste, while they were running every man to his own house. (Haggai i. 6-9.)

It was to this state of things that Haggai was sent to call attention; and his words were clothed with such energy and power, that in a little more than three weeks the chiefs of the people, and the people themselves, were aroused from their selfish apathy, and they obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people did fear before the Lord. (Compare Haggai i. 1 with *vv.* 12-15.) It would seem, then, that verse 1 of our chapter is a general statement of the work of the prophets, and that in versè 2 we have, in fact, the effect of Haggai's first message; or it may

be also the general effect of the prophetic work amongst the people. "Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them." This last expression will refer to the continuous work of the prophets during the progress of the building, by which Jehovah encouraged His people to persevere in their labours, unfolding before them the glory of the future in connection with the advent of Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom. The people builded, and the prophets prophesied, both alike filling their appointed places, and both alike fulfilling their task in fellowship with the mind of God. If the prophets spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Peter i. 21), it was Jehovah who stirred up the spirit of the builders (Hag. i. 14); and hence all alike laboured in the power of the Spirit, and all occupied the places assigned to them by the sovereign action of the grace of God.

The reader should again be reminded that the people did not wait for the renewal of their commission to build from the Gentile authorities. No doubt they were in subjection to the powers that were ordained of God, and that a decree had been obtained forbidding them to build; but God Himself had spoken, and if, therefore, they were to render to Caesar the things that were Caesar's, they were also to render to God the things that were God's. When God condescends to speak, His claims are supreme, paramount to every other consideration, whatever may be the consequences entailed. This principle was recognised by the builders of a later day, Peter and John, who, when forbidden to speak or teach in the name of Jesus, replied, "Whether

it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts iv. 19, 20.) In truth, faith links itself with God Himself, with His objects and His power, and can thus peacefully leave every other question with Him. Hence these children of the captivity obeyed the voice of their God, and went forward with their work, knowing that He held the hearts of all men in His hands, and that He could—as He did in the issue—use even the opposition of their enemies to further the work of His house. The record of the manner in which God manifested that He was above all the proud devices of the adversary is contained in the rest of this, and the following, chapter. First, we have the action of the Gentile governor, with his companions. We read:

"At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shethar-boznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall? Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building?" (*vv.* 3, 4.)

The governor, in making this enquiry, was undoubtedly within his rights, and acting in the interests of his sovereign, inasmuch as a decree prohibiting the building of the city, if not of the temple, had been issued. He could know nothing of any commandment except that of his own king. The children of this world can never understand the claims of God upon His people, and it always seems folly to them that they should brave the displeasure of an earthly monarch to please One in whom they themselves do not believe.

The fourth verse is somewhat ambiguous. Comparing it with verse 10, it is evident that the "we" of verse 4 applies to the enemies of Israel. It was they who asked, "What are the names of the men that make this building?"—their object being to report these transgressors of his commandment to the king. It is still Satan working behind the scene; and whenever God acts on the earth through His people, Satan immediately counterworks. This will be the force of the words, "At the same time." (v. 3.) We do not read of any persecution of the people during the time of which Haggai speaks, when they were building their own houses. But at once, on their resumption of their work upon Jehovah's house, they are met by new wiles—indeed, open opposition. The house of Jehovah was the testimony for that day, and it is this which Satan always hates. If believers settle down in the world, mind earthly things, become "dwellers on earth"—using this phrase in its moral sense—Satan will let them alone; but the moment, wrought upon by the Spirit of God, they apprehend His mind, and go forth in living testimony, the adversary will seek to turn them aside by any art or device which is likely to accomplish his purpose. We have a striking and perfect illustration of this principle in the life of our blessed Lord, as well as the exhibition of Satan's powerlessness to touch His people as long as they are maintained in dependence and obedience. (See Matt. iv.)

On the other hand, if Satan is merciless in his opposition, God is not indifferent to the needs and weaknesses of His servant when engaged in the conflict. We are thus told, immediately after this new effort of the enemy to deter the Jews from their work, "But the

eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius." The eye of God was upon His beloved people, beholding their danger, in order that He might minister the needed courage in the presence of the foe, to give them the consciousness of His presence and shelter, and thus to animate them to perseverance in their work. And indeed it is a wonderful thing for our souls when we in any measure realize that the eye of God is upon us. It produces in us that holy fear which makes us fearless of man, and also gives us the sweet sense of the overshadowing presence and protection of Him who has in His grace bound us to Himself by imperishable ties, while it brings to our lips the victorious challenge of the apostle, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" We are thus enabled to pursue the path of service to which we have been called in calm and peace, though surrounded by powerful enemies, because we are assured of the omnipotent succour of our God. It acts as an incentive both to perseverance and fidelity in service.

We have, in the next place, the copy of the letter which Tatnai and his companions sent to king Darius, from which fuller details of their visit to Jerusalem may be gathered. A brief analysis of this letter will be both interesting and profitable. They were evidently impressed with the work of the feeble Jews, for they tell the king, "We went into the province of Judca, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands." (v. 8.) Unlike the letter given in the former chapter, this gives at least a faithful report of the facts, though the object

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suffering grace and mercy was included between these two dates; and, alas! what a revelation of the heart of man—under divine culture as it was! In a word, between those two epochs is contained the history of the kingdom under man's responsibility, established in glory and splendour under Solomon as prince of peace (David was of course the first king, but it was the erection of the temple that marked the *establishment* of the kingdom) and destroyed in the reign of weak and wicked Zedekiah. (Read 2 Chron. xxxvi. 11–21.) Furthermore, they explain that the work on which they were employed was the result of a decree of Cyrus, in proof of which they told how he had committed to their care the vessels of gold and silver belonging to the temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away. (vv. 13–15.) They added, "Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and since that time, even until now, hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished." (v. 16.) If the account, so given by the Jews, were correct, they were entirely justified even in the eyes of man; for it was a well-known characteristic of the laws of the Medes and Persians (and Cyrus was king of Persia) that they could not be changed (Dan. vi. 8, 14, 15, &c.), and their adversaries were shown to be in error through ignorance of the law. Hence the letter now sent concludes with the request, "Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure-house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build the house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter." (v. 17.)

E. D.

SCRIPTURE NOTES.

I.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LAW.

Rom. viii. 4.

THIS expression, as many of our readers know, has been more exactly given as "the righteous requirement of the law." Taking it so, it has occasioned considerable difficulty from the place in which it is found. The connection shows that it is what is wrought out in the delivered soul—in those who have passed through the experience of chapter vii., and have practically learned that there is now "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," that "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" has delivered them from the law of sin and death. "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." But if we have been delivered from the law, and from efforts to fulfil it, why is it that we are told that the righteous requirement of the law is still fulfilled in us? It is not to be supposed for one moment that the work of the Holy Spirit in us, that the life of the Christian, is now limited by the legal standard; still it is mentioned. The reason for its introduction may be gathered from the preceding chapter. There the standard before the soul was obedience to the law. "The good I would" is simply this, the righteousness

of the law; and hence, after showing the way of deliverance, the apostle points out that "the good," which could never be attained while under law, is now reached in a new and better way; that is, what the law required, but never obtained, is now produced in those who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. How much more besides he does not here say. E. D.

II.

DISCIPLESHIP.

MATTHEW viii. 18-26.

A striking contrast is given in verses 19 and 21. When Jesus was about to depart to "the other side," "a certain scribe came, and said unto Him, Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." This man had been attracted by something in our blessed Lord, and desired to follow Him; but he saw no difficulties in the path, no refusal of self, and no cross, and besides this, he thought he could follow in his own strength wherever the Lord might go. He was instantly met by the presentation of the cross—of the character of the path, the rejection and loss it would entail. He disappears, is heard of no more. The second case is different. He did not shrink from the path, but he owned another claim. His heart was divided, and hence his request, "Suffer me first to go and bury my father." Affection for his father was drawing him back; but "whosoever loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." The Lord therefore claimed his immediate and whole-hearted allegiance by the word, "Follow thou Me; and let the dead bury their dead." He must learn that, if a disciple, neither the inclinations of his own heart, nor the impulse of

the tenderest affections, but the will of his Lord, must henceforward govern his path.

After these instructions, "when He was entered into the ship, *His disciples followed Him.*" He had, indeed, taught them how to follow; and this gives the key to the connected incident. No sooner had they embarked than a great tempest arose, "insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves; but He was asleep." We are here shown the character of the disciple's path, that it is one "through waves and clouds and storms," and as such always attended with peril, because in it the disciple has to meet the full brunt and opposition of Satan's power. Besides this, it will often seem as if He were asleep, as if He were unacquainted with, not to say indifferent to, the peril of His followers. If, however, the danger of the path, and the temptation of the disciple are revealed, so also is his resource. "His disciples came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish." They cry unto Him in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses; for He intervened at once in answer to their cry, after chiding them for their timidity and their want of faith, and "rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm." He would have them learn, and us also, that He is all-sufficient for the dangers of the road, and that, however fierce may be the storm, all is under His control; and that the power therefore of Him who has called us to follow Him is more than equal to all our emergencies, and to conduct us safely through all trial and opposition to "the other side." Thus He glorifies Himself over every effort of the enemy, and confirms the faith of His disciples by the display of His omnipotent power.

E. D.

III.

JACOB AT PENIEL.

GEN. xxxii.

We could not doubt for a moment that Jacob at Peniel learnt a deep lesson when God broke him down as he was planning, and had left God out of his calculations. God came in to show He would not be left out. His love and purposes of blessing won't allow Him to let us leave Him out in the workings of our own hearts. Broken down that night, he says, "I have seen God face to face." He really learnt the lesson, but he was not then able to put it into practice. It was a partial thing too; for while he got a new name himself, when he asks the Lord for His name He will not give it. He did give it to Abraham and Isaac. He made Himself known to them as God Almighty. Jacob does not learn His name then, but "He blessed him there." At once he goes and settles down at Shalem, and so far from going on with the God he had met, he does not at that moment profit by the lesson he had really learnt. He did not take it up in the practical experience of his soul until God disturbed the scene around him. He upsets Jacob thoroughly, and when he is broken down in his circumstances he does go to Bethel, and there God appears to him and reveals His name. It is only there he gets hold of it, and immediately all he has got by his planning begins to go. Deborah dies; Rachel dies; Joseph is taken down into Egypt; the famine comes over the land; and you see him at the end worshipping God. All he had (all of Jacob) was gone, and he takes the place of Israel (Genesis xlviii.); and his own heart is just filled with the thoughts of God. God's thoughts are filling his soul.

T. H. R.

CHRIST HEAD OF THE BODY.

AMONG the many glories of the ascended Son of Man, we may think of Him by the teaching of Holy Scripture as "Head of all principality and power," or as "Head of His body the Church" (or assembly). It is about the latter—the present marvellous relationship of Christ in heaven to His saints on earth—we would offer a few remarks as the Lord may graciously help.

And first of all let us not fail to notice that Scripture connects His headship to the assembly with His *ascension*; a point of moment not only as to accuracy, but as to its *effect* on our hearts when truly received, because it leads us to look to and have to do with Him in the place where He now is, as to everything connected with His assembly on earth. Poets have indulged the thought that the Head died for the members, but we know from Scripture that when here in incarnation He was "alone." "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." (John xii. 24.) Nor could we scripturally speak of Him, as has sometimes been said, as our risen Head; for although when He rose from among the dead He gave "life more abundantly"—risen life—and announced the glorious facts that in virtue of what He had done believers were now His "brethren," and brought into the same endearing relationship to the Father as Himself, He was *not then* given to be Head over His Church or assembly. There was as yet no Head, and consequently no members; the disciples were our Lord's "brethren" and God's "children," but not yet members of His body. The

body was not yet formed. "Go to my brethren," said Jesus unto Mary, "and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." (John xx. 17.) This was very precious, but the body was not yet formed. Till Jesus had *ascended* there was no one in heaven who could be Head of the body. When man, in the person of the Son, went through death into the glory of God, and was set at "His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come," then it was that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, gave Him to be "Head over all to the church [or assembly] which is His body." Here then we are definitely taught that it was in Christ in *ascension* that we have the first idea of the Head of the body, till which time there could have been no members formed on earth. Nor, in point of fact, could the body be formed till the coming of the Holy Ghost, which the ascended One received from the Father and shed forth; because we are told that it is "by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body." (Eph. i. 19-23; 1 Cor. xii. 13.) We could not therefore scripturally speak of Christ as Head of the assembly in the days of His flesh, or when He died, or when He rose again. Neither could we speak of Him as our risen Head; but we can look up to Him where He now is, and there know among many other glories that He who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, who is our life, our righteousness and peace, is the Head of His body the Church, or assembly. For such grace we cannot but praise God.

When we think then of God's assembly on earth,

it always connects us with Christ in ascension. Thus we are a heavenly people; our life, blessings, inheritance, supplies, and home, are there; so that we are partakers of a heavenly calling, and are taught to look for the Saviour to change our body of humiliation, fashion it like His body of glory, and take us there. The consciousness of this will produce heavenly-mindedness, and ways.

The more we ponder the truth, the more shall we be struck with the precious fact that the whole economy of the assembly on earth flows from association with Christ in ascension. For example, if it be a question of gifts for edification, they are from Him who ascended up on high, who led "captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." (Eph. iv. 8.) If it be the apostolate of the Church we are considering, we find an entirely new order of apostles from that of the kingdom as appointed in the gospels, though many of them might have been the same men; for of the ascended Christ it is said, "He gave some, apostles . . . for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. iv. 11, 12.) Paul was, as all know, one of these apostles; and besides being a minister of the gospel, was especially distinguished as a minister of the Church or assembly. (Col. i. 23, 25.) We all know that Peter was an apostle of the kingdom by our Lord's sovereign call and appointment when on earth; but we have only to view him in Acts i., and then in chap. ii., where he is seen as an apostle from the ascended Christ, and in the power of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and we cannot fail to be struck with the immense difference.

If the object and scope of Christ's present ministry from heaven be before us, then it will be found that it

is for those who are, or who may be, while on earth, connected with the Head in heaven; as before observed, it is for "the building up of the body of Christ." Ascension then is peculiarly the word for those who, through grace, even now on earth are by the Spirit united to the Head in heaven, and—oh, how marvellous!—are "members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." If our souls apprehended these things as they ought, we should easily see how dishonouring to our Lord it must be to think lightly of them, and how pleasing it is in His sight when our affections and interests are toward His saints as "members of *His* body" according to His mind, not only as the purchase of His own precious blood, but as one with Himself—"of His flesh and bones"—so that He could say to a persecuting Saul, "Why persecutest thou *me*?" May we ponder in our Lord's presence this "*me*," till we have something more of His own regard and care for His dear ones on earth! *Then*, and not till then, shall we be able to "endure all things for the elect's sake," and to see there could be no narrower limits to our love for each other than laying down our lives for the brethren. May the Lord stir afresh within us deep affections and suited ministries toward the members of His body!

We should never forget that "Head" and "members of the body" are relative terms. We cannot think of the Head without the thought of the members, neither should the thought of members of His body occupy us without thinking of the Head to which they are united; they must go together, for Christ is Head of the body. The "one new Man," which He hath "made in Himself of twain" (believing Jews and Gentiles), consists of Christ the Head in heaven, and

believers on earth united to Him and to each other by one Spirit. It is therefore entirely "new," not an improvement of the Jew's religion, but something which never was before, and never will be repeated; for it is "one," and yet a mystical body, perfect as consisting of Head and members, God's own workmanship, who hath "created us in Christ Jesus"—ONE NEW MAN. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in this mystery. Perfect wisdom, intelligence, sufficiency of grace, and never-failing supplies of truth, and blessings treasured up in the ascended and glorified One who is Head of the assembly, whose love, and care, and sympathy are as to His own flesh, and who ever regards us as His complement, or "the fulness of Him who filleth all in all." (Eph. i. 23.) What a marvellous union of Head and members is Christ and the assembly!

But He is not only Head of the body, He is also Head over all to the body. All her springs are in Him. He is to us the Fountain of living water. All our wisdom, all our strength, yea, all our resources, are in Him. Not only are we blessed in Him, accepted in Him, have redemption and are made nigh in Him and through His blood; but so truly are we the members of the one body with the Head, that all our endowments, all our ministrations, and all our sufficiency are in and through Him. And when this is truly apprehended as a divinely-given reality, it will certainly set us in the place of entire dependence on Him, as those who have nothing, and yet possess all things, even as when our being united to Him as members of one body to the Head first dawned upon the soul filled us with thanksgiving and worship.

Much failure was traced by the Spirit, when ad-

dressing the Colossian saints, to their "not holding the Head;" and no doubt very much that is wrong among believers in the present day may be traced to the same source. It is not that saints do not hold the doctrine that Christ is Head of the body, and speak of it in Scripture language; but "holding the Head" is much more than that. Those who are "holding the Head" are in communion with Him as to the members of His body. Their hearts and minds are interested in what interests Him. Their sympathies, affections, and care have no less a circle than "all saints." Such look at them, think of them, pray for them, and feel for them, in their measure, according to the mind, and heart, and care of the Head. It is impossible it can be otherwise if we are really "holding the Head." We believe there is no other prevention of, or cure for, sectarianism. When our hearts are really in communion with the Head of the body, we cannot be satisfied with a narrower circle than *all* the members of the body, or desire a larger circle for those deep springs and energies of the new life which we have in Christ, than the power and operations of the Holy Ghost who dwells in us. We repeat, it is much more than knowing the doctrine, and we believe it will be known in power by those only who have a conscience toward the Lord as to being in communion with Himself concerning the members of His body. We add that it has long been our conviction that many who resolve, and exhort others also, to cultivate a catholic spirit, and who desire to have no less scope for their interest and service than the whole Church of God, yet never become disentangled from a sectarian spirit on the one hand, or from being latitudinarian on the other, because they

do not accept in simple faith what the Spirit teaches, that "holding the Head" is the divine way, and only true way, whereby such desires can be accomplished. We cannot see how it is possible to be right with the "members of His body," unless we are right with "the Head;" nor can the true liberty which the Holy Ghost gives be known, in a day of ruin and in difficult times like the present, by such as are not "holding the Head;" for if we are truly in communion with Him, and in subjection to Him, the heart will be kept in freshness and care for "all saints," even though circumstances necessitate that in loyalty to Him we walk in a narrow path.

Perhaps no one ever knew what it was to be "holding the Head" better than the apostle Paul. Not only was he arrested by the wondrous revelation that Christ in heaven was one with His saints on earth, but to him was revealed the mystery of the assembly, and he was also made a minister of the assembly; and we can in some measure imagine what the effect of all this on his life and walk must have been. He writes to some believers whom he had not seen, "We are praying always for you;" and he desired they might know the conflict, or agony, he had for them, lest they should not intelligently and heartily acknowledge the mystery of God, and thus fail to answer to the Lord's mind of "holding the Head," and of being knit together practically in the membership of the body—for such is the great characteristic of Christianity. He could say to others, "I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ;" to others, "Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith." He wept over

others because they were dishonouring the Lord. The members of the body were so dear to him, that he suffered trouble and endured all things for the elect's sake, and said, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the assembly." So much was the welfare of the whole Church of God upon his heart, that he not only prayed for all saints, but could truly say, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?"

There is another point, never to be forgotten, as to the Head of the body, the assembly. It is that all the comfort, edification, and growth of every member flow *from* the Head. It may be *through* gifts, or such other members of the body as are neither pastors, teachers, nor evangelists, but in other ways, by joints and bands, and the different healthful exercises of the members according to their measure, and the grace given unto them, and the working and power of the Holy Spirit. No doubt all believers know that their blessings come to them in and through our Lord Jesus Christ; but here it is Christ the Head ministering in every way to His members, in the perfectness of love. He loved the Church, and gave Himself for it. He is now sanctifying and cleansing it with the washing of water by the Word, and in a little while He will present it to Himself a glorious assembly, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. How unspeakably dear to His heart must every member of His body be! What favour we all must have in His eyes! How precious to Him must the feeblest be!

"Oh, yes! Christ loves His Church,
'Tis her He lives to bless;

He cannot love her more,
 Nor will He love her less :
 Bone of His bone, cleansed by His Word,
 A bride adorned meet for her Lord."

There is, then, a constant ministration of grace and truth from the Head to all the members of His body; and as we are in communion with Him, "holding the Head," we shall be conscious of this living blessing from Him who nourisheth and cherisheth the assembly. But if the busy workings of unbelief, self-importance, and unjudged evil in words and ways come in, can it be otherwise than the grieving of the Holy Spirit, and the lack of comfort and edification to those who are so dear to the Head? When, however, in simple, child-like faith we are "speaking the truth in love," we shall surely grow up to Him in all things who is the Head, Christ, "from whom the whole body" (observe, *the whole body*, not one member excluded) "fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Eph. iv. 16. See also Col. ii. 19.) In this way we may expect growth and the increase of God. The difficulty is to seize and carry out this great principle of divine truth in a time of confusion and evil; but if only two or three are faithful to the Lord, and honour His name and word, such will in a very especial way have His presence and blessing, as many have proved. But let none expect, however well instructed they may be in Scripture knowledge, to have that communion with the Lord they desire, or to know His present mind, unless they are "holding the Head."

H. H. S.

1 JOHN I.

IN a wonderful way God is brought before us in this epistle, as manifested in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's nature is revealed as in no other part of Scripture. You have the two names which present to us what God is: "God is light" (v. 5), and, "God is love." (Chap. iv. 8, 16.) Now all God's actings are according to these two revelations of His nature, light and love. As someone has remarked, the difference between Paul's writings and John's is, that in the latter we have God presented to us, come down to us in a man; but in the epistles of Paul we have man presented to God, accepted in Christ; man gone up in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and accepted in Him. Just as He, on the cross, was the measure of our distance from God, He is now, at God's right hand, the measure of our nearness to God. In John's epistle we have Christianity pure and simple, and Christianity too as expressed in a person—Christ Himself.

I. FROM THE BEGINNING.

In verse 1 you get what only the apostle could say, "That which was from the beginning," &c.; they had seen and heard and known Him. Then John tells us why he makes this known. These things "declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us," &c. What a wonderful thing to have! There has been a real Person in this world, a perfect Man; a holy, righteous, dependent Man too; obedient, dependent, separated; everything that suited the heart of God—

one of whom God could always say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It was God in Christ (that is how Paul speaks of Him), expressing His own nature as light and love.

There are three words the apostle John delights in—light, life, love. Christ was life; He had life in Himself. Adam had not life in himself; Adam derived a life from his Creator. "God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." Christ had always life; there was never a moment when He began to live. He is the eternal Son of the eternal God. Now think of eternal Life coming down into this world, manifesting Himself in it! Eternal life is a Person. "That eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us." Look at the four things said about the eternal life here. The One from the beginning; they saw Him; they contemplated Him. They not only saw, but they also contemplated. Suppose it were dark, and the lightning flashed; you would see it, but you could not contemplate it; it is gone. Christ was not here like that, to be seen and gone; He stayed to be contemplated. That will be one of the blessed enjoyments of eternity in glory. We shall not get a passing glimpse of Him; we shall be able to contemplate Him for ever in the Father's house. The fourth is, "Our hands have handled." That shows He was not a mere myth; you could not handle a shadow. He was a tangible Person, as He says in the end of Luke, where He has His resurrection body, 'Handle me, and see that it is I myself,' &c. There is no such thing as a resurrection of spirits. The spirit cannot die or rise again. It is only predicted of the body. Christ died as to His body; His spirit went to His Father. "Father,

into thy hands I commit my spirit." His body, which died, was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.

The highest idea Christendom has of Christ is that He is a spirit. He is a real man. He said to them, "Why are ye troubled? . . . Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." Mark, that was the resurrection body they were handling. "When He had thus spoken, He shewed them His hands and His feet." He was not a myth, a shadow, a spirit; He was an actual person. Let me put it to you, beloved friends. Do you believe there is a real Man in heaven; that there beats upon the throne of God a human heart in deepest, truest sympathy with you down here who are washed from your sins by His blood? What a comfort to one's heart when one thinks of it—the eternal Son of the eternal God in a body of glory, a resurrection body! Those eyes of love are ever watching us; those ears of love ever listening to us; those lips of love ever speaking words of cheer and comfort to us; those hands which bled for us guiding us through this intricate scene; that heart of love beating with unchangeable affection towards us; and that man is our Saviour, our Life, our Head, our Hope! Is He all that to you, beloved?

Now I would like just to trace through Scripture that word "beginning." "That which was from the beginning." Just a sample from Old and New Testaments. Genesis i. 1 has nothing to do with the commencement of the six days of creation. The probability is that millions and millions of years took place between the first and second verses; plenty of time for the mighty

changes that took place in creation. That is the beginning of creation, not of Christ the Creator. In Prov. viii. you get the eternity of the Son brought out in a very remarkable way: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old." Jehovah possessed Christ, daily His delight, and His delights were with the sons of men. He proved that by becoming a man. There you get the magnificent unfolding of the eternity of the Son; the One *in* the beginning, not only from the beginning, who became a man, and proved by this His delights were with the sons of men.

Now will you turn to John i.? That really ought to come, so to speak, before Genesis i. There we have creation, whenever that took place; here we have the Creator, the Word. That was the expression of God Himself. "The only-begotten Son that is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." It shows who the Word was. Now look at the three things said about Christ, the creating Word, in these first verses: "In the beginning was the Word." There you get the eternity of the Son. He never had a beginning. He was there, the beginning of everything that had a beginning, and consequently had no beginning Himself. Then, "The Word was with God." There is the distinctness of the Son. "And the Word was God." The Deity, the divinity of the Son. He is eternal in His existence, distinct in His nature, divine in His being. This is the One who became a man to die for you and me. Oh, how our hearts should be bowed in worship as we think He is the very One who became the Lamb of God, to bear away the sin of the world!

Now I turn to another Scripture—Colossians i. You have the beginning brought out in another way. (v. 15.)

There you get His Godhead before any creation, creating everything, upholding everything by the word of His power; and He is the Head of the body, the assembly, the firstborn from among the dead. That shows that the assembly had no existence until His resurrection. Christ risen is the foundation upon which His assembly is built, Christ in the glory the Head. You could not have a body before the Head. He becomes the beginning of this wonderful body, the assembly of God united to Him by the Holy Ghost, come down from the Father and the Son ten days after Christ was glorified.

Once more, Revelation iii. 14. There creation does not refer to Genesis i. at all; it is the new creation. Just as Adam was the beginning of the old creation, so Christ, the second Man, risen and glorified at God's right hand, is the beginning of the creation of God. Individually we are not a new creation. "There is a new creation," of which every saved person forms a part; but there is no such thing as an individual being it.* A verse that seems to prove it is rather unhappily translated—2 Cor. v. 17. "New creature" should be "new creation." The whole old Adam standing came to an end; it has no existence before God at all; it judicially came to an end in the cross of Christ. "All things are of God." That is the new creation. When persons are saved they are brought into that new creation of which Christ, risen and glorified, is the Head as second Man, last Adam.

II. ETERNAL LIFE.

We turn again to our chapter. (v. 2.) Now, beloved, eternal life is a new word. We are accustomed to read

* It would be well to consider Ephesians ii. 10 in connection with this statement.—ED.

it without thinking really what eternal life is. Very few of us take the pains to sit down and think what eternal life is. I remember once asking an old saint if she would kindly tell me what eternal life was. "Oh, yes!" she said, "perpetuity of existence." "Then," I said, "you have nothing more than the devil has—he has perpetuity of existence." I believe that is a common idea. Even the lost have perpetuity of existence; for they will spend an eternity in the lake of fire, but they will not have eternal life. Children of God, saved persons, have eternal life. I have been very much struck in looking through the Old Testament Scriptures to find not one single instance of its being mentioned of an Old Testament saint that he had eternal life; it was not known. You only get the word twice mentioned in the Old Testament. I turn you to the Scriptures that you may see it—Psalm cxxxiii. 3. That is the first time, and there it is prophetic of the Jewish nation in the millennium. It has not received its fulfilment yet. It describes the unity of the nation. The Psalm is a marvellous little prophetic summary of the restoration of Israel in the millennial Zion. They knew nothing about a heavenly one, yet they will have a city on earth. Everything they expected was on earth. They looked for the land, and expected all their blessings there. What the character was of the life they had I do not know; it does not say it is life in Christ. Daniel xii. is the second and only time it is mentioned. Everlasting life. (*vv.* 1, 2.) What does that mean? The resurrection of the Jewish nation in the millennium. If you turn to that remarkable chapter—Ezek. xxxvii., the valley of dry bones—it is exactly what is referred to here. It is a future thing in both cases.

When you come to the New Testament that word studs its pages. The Holy Ghost introduces it in the most wonderful way, but always in connection with Christ; not natural life from Adam, but eternal life in Christ—the second Man, the last Adam. Eternal existence in the first, eternal life in the last, the beginning of the creation of God—“that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.” How could anyone know eternal life before? It was not manifested. I want you to see the characteristics of Christianity. People think there is no difference between us and Jewish saints. Everything is mixed up in their minds. Would that they would sit down and consider those words of Jesus Christ in His day, that of men born of woman there was not a greater than John Baptist—“Nevertheless the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” How could He have uttered such words if there was no difference between now and then?

Look for a moment at the wording of that verse: “The life was manifested, and we have seen it.” Christ was never manifested until incarnation. That is the very definition of Christianity in 1 Tim. iii. 16: “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in flesh,” &c. “We have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.” He was with the Father as the eternal Son of God from all eternity. He was never manifested till He came down here as a Man. That is a remarkable verse in 1 Timothy, where you get the foundation and top-stone of Christianity brought out, and all that comes between 1 Tim. iii. 16, which I have already quoted.

“Seen of angels.” What does that mean? That He had never assumed a form that was visible to angels before. He assumed a nature which made it possible for Him to be seen of angels. They saw their Creator in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the man Christ Jesus, in that lowly garb, thought to be the carpenter’s son, the very Son of Mary, they saw their good Creator—“preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” Glory the top-stone; so that God come down here in a Man is the foundation of Christianity. Man gone up into glory in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ is the top-stone. If you surrender the one you surrender the other too. That second verse of 1 John i. is an overwhelming verse. “What is eternal life?” you say. “How are we to know we have it?” Look at John xvii. a moment, where you get the Lord in His wondrous prayer with His Father. There you get the divine definition of eternal life. (v. 3.) The revelation of the Father and the Son to the heart of the believer. Do you know God and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent? That is eternal life. Beloved, eternal life is a Person. You find it brought out in other parts of this same epistle. (Chap. v. 11, &c.) “God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.” There you get the distinct statement—life not in Adam, but in Christ. It is a mercy for you and me that it is there, and not in our keeping. “In His Son.” How am I to know I have it? “These things write we unto you, that ye may know ye have eternal life.” Those that believe on the name of the Son of God have it.

Look at the four things God says there. He has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son; He is

the life, and it is written that we may know we have it, and that we may have our knowledge based on the sure authority of the word of God Himself. How do we know that eternal life is the Person of the Lord Himself? Look at verses 20, 21. The word "this" should be translated "He"—"He is the true God and eternal life." The very sentence proves it. There is the eternal life, and that is your life and mine if we are Christians at all. Is not that something more than perpetuity of existence? It is a link with the Son of God. He is the source of eternal life in the believer, and the sustainer of it; He is the eternal life Himself in the believer, and you never can have that but in Christianity. You get no unfolding of it before Christ came, and it is not predicted of saints after Christ has taken His Church to glory, only of persons who live between those two eras—the coming down of Christ to die for us, and His return to receive us to Himself to be for ever in His Father's house on high. I am not saying Old Testament saints and millennial saints have not life; for, as we have seen, it speaks of "life for evermore," and "everlasting life;" but it is never said to be in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. FELLOWSHIP.

Verse 3. Now you have another word—"Fellowship." Now if eternal life is a word that occurs seldom in the Old Testament, the word fellowship occurs equally seldom. It is only used twice, and never as to the heart's fellowship with God at all.

The first time it occurs in the New Testament is in Acts ii. 42. Why don't you get it before? Because until you had eternal life revealed, manifested, and

until it was communicated, there could be no such thing as fellowship. How could God take people into fellowship with Himself until He put their sins away? It is not until Christ died, rose again, and went to heaven, and the Holy Ghost came down, that you get the word. It looks as if it had been coined in the mint of heaven, and the Holy Ghost had brought it down fresh from glory. Now sin having been put away, judged, and the first Adam having come to his end in the cross of Christ, and Christ risen and glorified, He could bring the believer into fellowship with the risen Christ. It is a resurrection blessing. The Holy Ghost down here indwelling us is the power of fellowship with the Father and the Son.

There is great confusion as to what fellowship is. People confound love with fellowship. Sympathy is not fellowship; that is my coming down to your level, suiting myself to you. Fellowship is more the bringing you up to my level. Christ comes down to my level to sympathize with me; but it is to make me superior to my circumstances, and bring me into fellowship with Himself. Fellowship is heart being knit to heart, community of thought, object, aim, desire, interest, and affections. Now just think that God has brought us into fellowship with Himself. It is most overwhelming how He speaks of fellowship in that chapter. Not merely fellowship with the apostles through their writings, but "with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ."

Verses 5-7. That is Christian fellowship. It does not mean the Father and the Son there; it is believers having fellowship together. By God's grace and the redemption work of our Lord Jesus Christ we are

brought into this wonderful circle of fellowship (2 Cor. xiii. 14)—fellowship with Jesus by the Spirit, with the Spirit through the word of God, with one another; and where? In the light, as God is in the light. What sort of thing is fellowship? The holiest thing possible, and it is no fellowship if it is not absolutely holy. My fellowship with the Father must be according to His nature; it must be according to holiness and truth. "Holy Father" the Lord calls Him in John xvii., and "Righteous Father." It must be in separation from all this moral ruin, and with God as the true God; and it must be in separation from all moral and doctrinal evil. Christ is the Holy and the True, so it must be in character with holiness and truth. The Spirit is called the *Holy* Spirit, the Spirit of truth; then it must be in separation from all that is not holy and not true. And with each other in the light. What characterizes the light? Holiness and truth. Better walk alone in fellowship with the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost in holiness and truth, than walk in the greatest company and sacrifice them. Do you see what it is to have fellowship with the Father in His pure and deep and precious thoughts about the Son? To have fellowship with the Son about the Father, and with the Holy Ghost about the Father and the Son, and with one another in the light, over these deep and precious thoughts that have been communicated by Father, Son, and Holy Ghost?

Fellowship is a most wondrous thing. I believe it is one definition of heaven; it is what will characterize heaven. What will make the bliss of heaven throughout eternity? Absolute, uninterrupted, perfectly pure, and perpetual fellowship with the Father, Son, and

Holy Ghost, and one another. It will be eternal separation from all that is unholy and untrue. We have not begun, some of us, to know what fellowship means. May the Lord give us to know the meaning of it.

There are only two things—darkness and light. All in the darkness are unconverted, those in the light are saved. We cannot get out of the light if we are saved. The grace of God and the redemption work of Christ have brought us into the light as God is in the light. The apostle is not occupied with *how* we are walking, but *where*. Not that how we walk is unimportant. You may walk badly, but it is in the light you walk. That is what makes it such an awful thing to be naughty.

You get it clearly brought out in the next chapter: "The darkness is passing; the true light now shineth." When a person is saved, that person passes out of darkness into light. "The light shineth in darkness." "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now light in the Lord," Eph. v. puts it. The Lord was light in Himself; we are not light in ourselves, but in the Lord. And the exhortation is, "Walk as children of light." We are taken out of darkness. Think of it, beloved. The greater sense we have in our souls that we are in the light as God is in the light, the more we shall desire to have a walk suited to it; but we measure all responsibility by our relationship. We are in the light to start, and our responsibility flows from that fact.

Now then, what is the consequence of this? "That your joy may be full." (v. 4.) Why is there so little joy amongst Christians? I often ask, "Why are we not brimming over with joy?" People think they must wait till they get to heaven. The psalmist could

say, or rather the Holy Ghost prophetically speaking the language of the Lord Jesus, the perfectly dependent Man: "In thy presence is fulness of joy." We should live in the presence of God now, always near God, and joy would be the effect; that is now. "And at thy right hand pleasures for evermore;" that is by-and-by, when the Lord comes back. God would have us full of joy. "That your joy may be full." What is the hindrance? It is because we don't know Him that is from the beginning. What characterizes the "fathers" is that they know Him that is from the beginning. Paul says, "That I may know Him." We know something about Him; can we say, "We know Him"? The Lord give us to know Him more who is from the beginning, to know that *He* is our eternal life, and to know ever deepening "fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ," and thus we shall be full of divine joy.

H. M. H.

God has always desired to have the perpetual adoration of His redeemed. We thus read of singers in connection with His service who "were employed in that work day and night." And when the Lord was parted from His disciples, He blessed them, and was carried up into heaven. "And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God." Then, too, there are the four living creatures who rest not day and night in their ascriptions of praise. So will it be when all the redeemed are gathered around the Lord in heaven. Their whole existence will be characterised by continual never-ending praise.

THE BOOK OF EZRA.

CHAP. vi. 1-15.

THE king thus appealed to ordered the search to be made, and the decree of Cyrus was found. (vi. 1-5.) The statement of the Jews was thus confirmed in every particular, and even more; for it was now discovered that Cyrus had not only issued his^d decree for the rebuilding of the temple, but had also ordered "the expenses to be given out of the king's house," as well as directed the restoration of the sacred vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away. Acting then upon this decree, Darius commanded Tatnai, Shetharboznai, and their companions to cease to molest the Jews, and to allow them to continue their work in peace. God was manifestly to faith working behind the scenes, and using the power of the enemy for the accomplishment of His own purposes; affording another instance of how He causes all things to work together for good to them that love Him. For not only did Darius, on the interposition of their adversaries, confirm the decree of Cyrus, but he also issued another to the effect that all the necessary provision for the house of God should be made at his expence. He says, "Moreover, I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews, for the building of this house of God: that, of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expences be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. And that which they have need of, both

young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt-offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail: that they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons." (vi. 8-10.)

When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him (Prov. xvi. 7); and when found, therefore, in the path of His will, he may safely leave his enemies in the Lord's hands. So these elders of the Jews discovered, and they might have learned the lesson often taught in the word of God, and ever needed by His people, "They that be with us are more than they that be with them."

Thus God Himself was the shield of His people while engaged in His service; and as long as they were obedient to His word, and counting upon Him for strength and defence, it was not possible for them to be hindered. In this way Satan once more overreached himself, and was used to further the work that he so hated; just as the apostle wrote in after centuries, "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." (Phil. i. 12.) When Satan succeeded in shutting Paul up in prison, he thought he had gained a victory, even as he did in the most notable case of all, when he urged the Jews to demand the crucifixion of their Messiah; but in both instances his apparent success was a most disastrous defeat. We may well, therefore, whatever the opposition or persecution, go calmly forward, courageous in perseverance, because it is the Lord's work on which

we are engaged, and He has said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the ages."

Darius went still further. He added, "Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and, being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this. And the God, that hath caused His name to dwell there, destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed." (*vv.* 11, 12.) The king thus surrounded the Jews with his authority, and guarded them against further molestation by attaching the penalty of death to interference with their work. And from the language employed, it can scarcely be doubted that Darius had himself some knowledge of "the God of heaven," for he speaks of Him as causing "His name to dwell there." Be this as it may, God disposed his heart in favour of His people and of the work of building His house. The effect of the decree was instantaneous, for we read that Tatnai and his companions "did speedily" according to that which Darius had sent, and forthwith all opposition ceased, and the enemies of the work disappeared from the scene.

Not only had the opposition to the work of the house of God now ceased; but God, in His care for His people, and in response to their faith, had also turned the heart of the king toward them; so that his royal power had now become their shelter and defence. Hence we read:

"And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet,

and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. And this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king." (*vv.* 14, 15.)

Before entering upon the particulars of this statement, we may recall to the minds of our readers a striking parallel from the history of building the house of God in the New Testament. In connection with the death of Stephen, there arose "a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles." Soon after, on the visit of Saul, after his conversion (we say after his conversion, in fact several years had elapsed (see Gal. i.); but we speak of the order of the narrative), to Jerusalem, opposition was once more aroused, and the Grecians went about to slay Saul; and the brethren sent him forth to Tarsus. (*Acts ix.* 29, 30.) The statement follows: "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified (built up); and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." (*Acts ix.* 31.) God had given them rest from persecuting enemies, and they, by His grace, used the opportunity to build themselves upon their most holy faith. So was it with the elders of the Jews. They builded, and they were encouraged by the comfort of the Holy Ghost as ministered by the prophets.

It is of importance to notice these two classes—the builders and the prophets. As pointed out, when expounding Haggai, these two characters of service can

never be confounded. A builder cannot assume the functions of a prophet, nor could a prophet exchange his prophetic mantle for the trowel of the builder. Hence the apostle says, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of the faith; or ministry (service), let us wait on our ministering" (service). (Rom. xii. 6, 7.) A builder is one whose work it is to lay stones upon the foundation; one, that is, who is used of God, by preaching or teaching, to gather souls, to bring them as living stones to the foundation which is Jesus Christ. (See 1 Cor. iii.) A prophet is one who both urges the people forward in their work by the communication of the mind of God, and who also tests everything by His word. A prophet sets the conscience in the presence of God, maintains, therefore, the sense of responsibility, and ministers guidance, rebuke, or exhortation according to the need of the moment, speaking as he is moved by the Holy Ghost—now, of course, through the written Word, but guided of the Spirit to the word suited to the case.

Thus the elders of Israel laboured, and the prophets prophesied; and it is also recorded that "they prospered through the prophesying," etc. The reason is evident. The Holy Spirit was acting in power, first through the prophets, and, secondly, in producing a response to the word of God, as ministered by the prophets, in the hearts of the builders. All through the history of the kingdom the nation prospered when they heeded the voice of their prophets; and, on the other hand, every evil consequence flowed from disregard of these heaven-sent admonitions and warnings. Nor is it different in the church of God. Whenever "the builders" are attentive

to the prophets who unfold and apply the mind of God as revealed in His word, they prosper, their work is durable, and they themselves receive blessing. But if they are careless of divine guidance and monition, and work after their own thoughts, they do but corrupt the work upon which they are engaged, and introduce wood, hay, and stubble in the place of gold, silver, and precious stones. Their work may seem greater, and even more prosperous, to the eye of man; but it remains to be tested at a future day, and the Lord alone is the judge of true prosperity of service.

There was now no further interruption, for they continued their work until they had finished it; and, as the Spirit of God carefully notes, it was finished "according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment (or decree) of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia." All was done, therefore, in obedience to God, and by the permission of the earthly power to which, by God's appointment, they were in subjection. Blessed privilege for these workmen so to have laboured, and no small honour, it may be added, for these Gentile monarchs thus to be associated with and to be used for the execution of the purposes of God! No doubt—and the lesson ought not to be passed over—the names of the kings are thus mentioned to show, for one reason, the value God attaches to the principle of obedience to constituted authority. The only limit, as before pointed out, is where the "powers that be" intrude their claims into the province in which God is supreme. The moment human authority clashes with the claims of God over the soul it becomes null and void. With this exception (Acts iv. 19) the believer has ever to

submit to the powers that are ordained of God. (Rom. xiii.)

Then the date is added on which the house was completed. It was on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. That is, there were four years occupied from the recommencement of the building until its completion. (Chap. iv. 24.) How many years had passed away since the foundation was laid cannot be exactly ascertained, inasmuch as the length of the reign of the sovereigns between Cyrus and Darius is not given. It could scarcely have been less, and was^d probably more, than twenty years. With what long-suffering and patience God had borne with the failures of His people. And now that His purpose is accomplished, and the house builded, with what delight He calls our attention to the labours of His people. Although all had been wrought by His grace, in that same grace He reckons to His people that which He Himself had wrought. And so it ever has been, and will be, as the judgment-seat of Christ will abundantly testify. For if any of us receive for the good things we have done through the body, we shall confess to His praise that He Himself was the source and the power of every such good work which He has been pleased to commend.

OBEDIENCE to the Word is the way of love to God, to Christ, and to the children of God. (John xiv. 15; 1 John v. 2, 3.) It will therefore be easily understood that obedience is the way, and the only way, of blessing.

“ON HIS HEAD WERE MANY CROWNS.”

REV. xix. 12.

THERE in heaven, for now eighteen hundred years and more, it is blessed to think of the Lord as finding His own delight and joy in caring for that Church whom He has so loved and purchased. (Eph. v. 26, 27.) And here, travelling along the sands of the desert, often stumbling and sometimes weary, how blessed to think of the Holy Ghost *never* weary of directing her eye to Him, the One there *for* her in all the exercises of the way! And think, this has all continued now for more than eighteen centuries, and many a pilgrim has proved it all, and been cheered along his path by knowing it; yet there it is in all its truth for you and for me this day, Christ's present love and care, and the Holy Ghost's present ministry, cheering your heart by bringing *Him* before you. Is the Lord *weary* of what has been His occupation for eighteen hundred years? or is the Holy Ghost weary of directing the eye upward to Christ? Oh, to rise now above the gloom that has all along been deepening, and to see that blessed One there, and still to be able to say as part of His bride, “He is waiting for *me!*”

And now in this passage which we have read He is coming forth from that place and service of eighteen hundred years, coming forth to reign on the earth with His bride. HE has prepared her for Himself, and His wife “hath made herself ready.” And what is the language before us here? How the Holy Ghost delights,

as freshly as if for the first time, in drawing our attention to *Him*. "ON HIS HEAD were many crowns." He who first directed her eye to *Him* as caring for her all along while she trod the desert, now also draws her attention afresh to Him in the day of His glory! How your heart and mine, thus called upon, delight to respond that all this is as it should be. How *personal* is all this to the soul; and how true it is that true affection is always personal! He wants me to be engaged with *Him*, and He wants my heart to be *now* just simply His own, to fill it by and from Himself.

"On His head were many crowns." Will you not respond, "Lord, thou art worthy of them all"?

But what do you see in those "many crowns"? To me they have a voice which speaks to my *heart*. If I see a Christian, I see one stumbling along in the desert, desiring, if ever so feebly, that Christ may be seen in *his* walk and ways here below. Because the Holy Ghost dwells in him there must be this desire, more or less, according as we give that blessed Spirit His place, and for which He is here; namely, to be the guiding star of our earthly life. And what does He bring out in you? Lowliness? patience? meekness? long-suffering? temperance? goodness? Yes, there are all these toward others, and there is what is more for your own personal enjoyment too—"Love, joy, peace." (Gal. v. 22, 23.) Has He brought these things out of us toward others, and to us for *our* own enjoyment, in any little measure to-day? Alas! how we all fail in this, the "lowliness." How have they seen it in me to-day? The "patience," the "meekness," the "long-suffering," the "temperance," the "goodness"—all perfectly displayed in HIM as He once trod the path in which I am

called now for a little while, only "*a little while*," to tread. (Heb. x. 37.)

Blessed Lord, the only perfect display of the perfection of a man, dependent on God, was seen in Thee, and this is what reaches the heart and touches our affections. *On Thy head alone* can we place the crown as to each of these, "lowliness," "patience," "meekness," "long-suffering," "temperance," "goodness." Has many a poor saint in his trials displayed some measure of these? Yes; and yet Thou excellest them all. And coming forth in that day of glory, how *will* our hearts delight to see Him wearing these many crowns, His desert as man, besides all those that are His by title as the gift of the Father! For "He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke i. 33.)

Crowns befitting Him as "Lord of lords, and King of kings" will then alone be His, and I shall be called on to behold Him arrayed in them *all* on that day. But when I think of Him as the lowly *Man*, walking down here in the midst of all the trials and difficulties that marked His path (and now mine), and see the perfect display of all the *graces* that surrounded that path, I am humbled at how little they are seen in me, one who has professed to have set out to follow Him in the same path! But we can gaze at one perfect model, poor as we are, and think of *His* meekness, lowliness, patience, temperance, long-suffering, and *His* goodness when on earth, and *thus* we shall become less selfish and more like Him, of whom the Holy Ghost delights to say, "On His head were many crowns." Think of *that* day you who suffer in this.

May our hearts be more and more set, in the midst

of whatever path we may be in—blessed it always is (Psalm xvi. 6), painful it may be—to desire to provoke in one another the *display* of these things that characterized our blessed Lord as He walked here among men.

H. C. A.

SCRIPTURE NOTES.

I.

MATTHEW xviii. 20.

“WHEREVER two or three are gathered together unto (*eis*) my name, there am I in the midst.” Clearly this is not a promise, but a simple statement of fact dependent upon the fulfilment of a condition. In other words, the Lord here says that He is ever in the midst of those who are gathered together unto His name. Everything, therefore, rests upon what this condition means. When the Lord was down here on the earth His name was Jesus (Matt. i.); but He was also the Christ. (John i. 41, &c.) After His death and resurrection He was made Lord and Christ (Acts ii. 36); and He still retains the name of Jesus. (Acts vii. 59; Phil. ii. 9–11, &c.) His full name for believers now (though He will have other names and titles by-and-by) is the Lord Jesus Christ. Now name in Scripture is the expression of the truth of what a person is; and so understanding it here, it will be the expression of all that Christ is as the Lord Jesus Christ. The term Lord signifies authority (see Luke vi. 46); Jesus is His personal name (Luke i. 31); and inasmuch as He was made Christ after His death and resurrection, this term includes His work. When, then, we are truly gathered unto His name, we are gathered to the truth of His

person, His work, and His authority; and these are the three things those gathered unto His name have to maintain. To surrender one only of these would be to give up Christianity—as to its public maintenance. Hence John says, “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine—the doctrine of the Christ—receive him not into your house, nor bid him God-speed: for he that biddeth him God-speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” (2 John 10, 11.) Such an one indeed has given up the truth of the work of Christ.

But to return. All three things must be held fast if the presence of the Lord is to be enjoyed. And observe that it does not follow that we are gathered unto the name of the Lord Jesus Christ because we profess to be so. Moreover, it will not suffice to say that “we are on that ground;” for the question is, “*Is the ground maintained?*” For example, suppose a company of believers are careful to insist on the truth of the person and of the work of Christ, but are negligent as to His authority—systematically accept the authority of man—they would not be fulfilling the condition of our passage. It behoves us, on this account, carefully to ask ourselves whether, in the regulation and order of assemblies, we are permitting the authority or influence of man in anywise to conflict with the authority of the Lord as expressed in His word. On the other hand, wherever saints are seeking by the grace of God to fulfil this condition of being gathered unto His name, there the Lord is certainly in the midst of them. Into the question of maintaining discipline according to holiness, we do not here enter, as we now call attention only to that which gives the title to the Lord’s presence.

Blessed is it for any company of saints to know that the Lord is in the midst of them. In the millennial day we read, "And the prince in the midst of them, when they go in (to worship), shall go in; and when they go forth, shall go forth." (Ezek. xlvi. 10.) But it is open to us, in anticipation of the Jew, and in a higher and a better way, to have the Lord Jesus Christ in our midst when gathered unto His precious name. E. D.

II.

"THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT."

The flesh degrades a man. Think of the Roman centurion seeing the heads of the Jewish nation turning out to mock a poor criminal dying, as it seemed to be. There was the religion and the learning of the nation thus employed. The two high priests, the elders, the scribes, even to human sight, were degrading themselves. This was the flesh fully blown. Enmity really against God expressed; but to what a depth its manifestation had sunk poor man!

Contrast this with the moral elevation to which the Holy Spirit can raise the same fallen man, as seen, for example, in Stephen. There we see him calmly kneeling down, death in view, the storm of malice, injustice, and violence round him, everything to rouse the flesh; but the flesh held dead. There is no sign of revenge or any feeling that morally could lower a man; but in perfect moral greatness he rises above himself and prays for his murderers. This is the effect of the action of an ungrieved Spirit in a fallen man. No trace is seen practically of anything but Christ, which of course is perfect moral greatness and beauty.

Now it is the same with us. These are exceptional and extreme cases ; but it is true in smaller ones too. If a father, for example, loses his temper in correcting his child, he has degraded himself. His conscience knows it, and also the child, who may dread him the more, but respects him less. Could the centurion respect the chief priest after he had seen him mock his victim at the cross? Satan's power no doubt was there, and the effect of his work is always to degrade. What could be worse than with a kiss to betray your friend? But Satan was there too; he had entered into Judas. Now the blessed effect of Christ's work is to elevate the object of His love. Dying in grace for our sins and ourselves, He puts away all that could bring condemnation upon us, and gains by that work in which God was glorified a place for Himself as man in the glory of God, to which glory He is conducting His people ; and now grace gives the believer a place in Christ—the best robe of the prodigal. May the Lord give us to know more what mercy has done, and to prove the power of an ungrieved Spirit in our daily lives.

C. D. M.

III.

GRACE.

HEBREWS xiii. 9.

There is nothing so hard for our hearts as to abide in the sense of grace. It is by grace that the heart is "established," but there is nothing more difficult for us really to apprehend than the fulness of grace.

Grace supposes all the sin and evil in us, and is the blessed revelation that through Jesus Christ all this sin and evil has been put away. A single sin is more

horrible to God than a thousand sins, nay, than all the sins in the world, are to us; and yet with the fullest consciousness of what we are, all that God is pleased to be towards us is LOVE! It is vain to look to any extent of evil; a person may be (speaking after the manner of men) a great sinner or a little sinner; but this is not the question at all. Grace has reference to what God is, and not to what we are, except indeed that the very greatness of our sins does but magnify the extent of the "grace of God." I have got away from grace if I have the slightest doubt or hesitation about God's love—I shall then be saying, "I am unhappy because I am not what I should like to be." But this is not the question; the real question is, whether God is what we should like Him to be—whether Jesus is all we could wish. If the consciousness of what we are—of what we find in ourselves—has any other effect than while it humbles us, to increase our adoration of what God is, we are off the ground of pure grace. The effect of such consciousness surely should be to humble us, but to make our hearts reach out to God, and to His grace as abounding over it all.

J. N. D.

WE read in Nehemiah of one who was "at the king's hand in all matters concerning the people." This is no mean shadow of the present place of our Lord and Saviour, who has gone into heaven to appear in the presence of God for us. He is there at God's right hand, ever living to make intercession for us, having, we might say, undertaken the whole of our cause in all matters which concern us.

THE FATHER'S HOUSE.

JOHN xiv.

IN this part of the gospel of John the Lord is leading His disciples away from earth to associate their minds with Himself up in heaven. That begins from chap. xiii. In chapters viii. and ix. we have His rejection. Then, chap. x., He states He will have His sheep in spite of everything. Chap. xi., that which He was on earth as Son of God borne witness to. Chap. xii., the Son of David riding on an ass, and Son of man when the Greeks come to Him; but He says, "I must die." He cannot have to say to the disciples on the earth, though loving them to the end. Then He washes their feet, and says, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." The possibility of His having a part with man down here was over—the world had rejected Him; and now, instead of blessing the disciples here, He was taking their hearts up there. The thread that runs through the rest of the gospel, up to the last chapter, is—not *here*, but *there*, and you must take up your cross here.

In chap. xiv. the Lord gives us our portion on the ground of taking us up there. They would not have Him with them; but He says, "Let not your hearts be troubled at my going away. You don't get the comfort of God by seeing Him in bodily presence, and so with me. Ye believe in God, believe also in me." He is going to prepare a place, that is the whole thing. "I am going to my Father. I have brought you re-

deemed ones into the same relationship as I am in; He is your Father as much as mine, and your God as much as mine. I am not to be alone there. In my Father's house are *many* mansions. I go to prepare a place for *you*." The place He was going to prepare (and that He was putting before their hearts) had this specific character, that the children were at home there. He had brought them into this place of children before God and the Father; and, therefore, when the time was come, they should go to the Father's house. The thought and purpose of God was to have us with Christ and like Him, His own blessed Son, in His house. "I will come again, and receive you unto myself"—in the Father's house—"that where *I* am, there ye may be also." Where the Son is, in the joy and blessedness and rest and glory of the Father's house, there we are to be with Himself. That is His purpose—what He is bringing us to. Then He adds this blessed truth, that He is coming back Himself to fetch them. He is interested in them, and it is a fixed abiding interest. He would not be satisfied to *send*, but would come Himself. What wonderful blessing! It would be an honour to be *sent* for as redeemed ones who are everything to Him. I may send to meet a person I make something of; but if I make a great deal of him, I go myself.

He goes on to tell us how we know it all now, so that our souls live in it while He is away. The blessed Lord's death—redemption—giving us a title to be in no less a place than the Father's house, like and with Himself. But while His death accomplished that for us, it was a total breach with the world. "The world seeth me no more." He is going to the Father's house,

and the world and the Father are in direct opposition. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God." They saw no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. And when He was rejected by the world, He went up to sit at the Father's right hand. The *accepted One of the Father was the rejected One of the world.* Man may have hopes that he is going to do a great deal with man. God has done all as to responsibility. And at last He says, "I have one Son, they will reverence Him." But they said, "Come, let us kill Him." The Lord says, "Now is the judgment of this world." The obedient, accepted One of the Father sits on His right hand, on His total rejection by the world, and He takes His redeemed ones to be with Him there. We get the place of sons; we are to have the glory; to be conformed to the image of His Son, the First-born among many brethren. While His work on the cross put away our sins, it gives us a place with Him and like Him in the glory.

After the statement of this in the first three verses, we get how to realize it now in our souls. There are two parts—First, the object that is before us; and second, the power that is in us. First He tells us the place He is going to take us to—it is the *Father's house.* And what makes the Father's house of importance to the child—if he has right affections? It is, that the *Father* is there. The blessedness of being there is that the Father is there. Christ is there too. However feebly we may enjoy it now, when we talk of "going to heaven," it is going to the Father. The Lord says, "No man cometh to the Father, but by me." He was going to the Father, and bringing us in spirit there now, hereafter actually in glory. Therefore they

say, "Show us the Father." No one has seen God at any time; but there is that blessed relationship of the Father to the Son, and to us as putting us in His place. He brings us to the Father. So He says, "Where I go ye know, and the way ye know." Thomas thought of a *place*. "We know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?" The Lord says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." And then we get the point—"No man cometh to the Father, but by me." If I know the Father, I know where He has gone and where I am going. When Philip says, "Show us the Father," He answers, "You have the Father this long time with you revealed in the Son. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." There we have this blessed truth, that when the Lord tells us He is going to bring us to the Father's house, we know what the blessedness of that house is, we know the centre of it. We know the Father because He is perfectly revealed in the Son. In coming to Christ I have found the way. I may see "through a glass darkly;" but as to the object, I have got the Father Himself revealed in Christ, so that in believing on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ I know the blessedness I am called to—the place of Christ as Son, He who is the source and centre of eternal blessedness, loving-kindness, and favour. It is not the mere abstract theory of God and of a holy place that it is; but I stand in a perfect relationship, and the Spirit of adoption crying Abba in my heart, there is a consciousness of the love that has put me in this place of favour. If I say, How can I know I have seen the Father, a poor worm such as I? Have you seen Christ (not with the outward eye, but seen Him by faith)? "He that hath seen *me* hath seen the Father."

The spring of all our blessedness is in Christ, actually when He comes, and the soul lives in it *now* as far as he is in heavenly-mindedness, and in spirit enjoys it all, looking forward in the brightness and blessedness of hope to being there. I must for this understand the work as well as the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is my title. I know in His death my sins are perfectly put away, and what He has done is so perfect in glorifying God that He has taken His place at the right hand of God *as man*, and that gives *me* a place. He can say, "Glorify thy Son." There we get the relationship, and then, "I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me," &c. That is the title by the work, and He has done the work for *me*. He has gone to the Father, and in Him is the way to go. He makes us feel that blessing is for us as a *present thing*. I quite admit we see through a glass darkly; but the things I shall get in heaven are not things I have not had revealed on earth. I have not seen the glory, but if I speak of the Father's love as my portion there, it is that which has given me Christ *now*. If of my title, it is no new thing but the work and blood-shedding of Christ; if of eternal life, I have it now in His Son (shall have it fully then). Whether the thing enjoyed or the title to enjoy, we have it now, though we do not apprehend it fully. What a thought to be able to say, according to Christ's own thoughts of the blessedness of heaven, "I have it now." He was revealing the Father's name: "I have declared thy name unto them, and will declare it." What He tells them is: "Now you have seen the Father, the very one my delight is in, and my joy (eternally infinite of course), the One that I walk on

earth with, that I am one with. I have brought you into this relationship with Him, and revealed Him to you. How far can we say, "I have got on earth what I am to have in heaven—the revelation of the Father in the Son"? What settled quietness of spirit it gives, to have found yourself with the Father, through the knowledge of the Son, in confidence of heart! Have your hearts got that? Are they really occupied with the Father? (worshipping of course; but the clearer the knowledge of the relationship is, the more worship there will be.) He is the way. Can you say, "I have been that way, and He has brought me to the Father"? That is, in this world; it will be no new thing up there. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Can our hearts say, "I have found the Father in Christ"? That is what the Lord was insisting on; and there was far more ignorance then than now, for the Holy Ghost had not come.

J. N. D.

WHICH is happiest, to be like water in a still place never moved, or to be poured from vessel to vessel, finding it all Christ, and Christ, and Christ? The Lord does not let the prospect of glory into the soul when any are settled on their lees, but when they are poured from vessel to vessel. He chooses the time of trial as a time to give the sweetest taste of His love. When in a time of difficulty, faith may break down, but Christ will not. He sees when the storm comes, and makes that the time to come to us; walking on the waters, and at His word the storm subsides in a moment.

G. V. W.

MEPHIBOSHETH.

How lovely a foreshadowing of the grace of God have we in the brief history of this man as recorded in 2 Samuel. In his descent from the fallen, disobedient, and rejected king Saul we read our alliance with the man who fell, and who by disobedience plunged all his race into ruin and condemnation. Lame on both his feet depicts our actual moral condition in this place of condemnation. Far away from Jerusalem, the centre of earthly blessing, we see the alienation of heart and mind in which we are from God, the only source and centre of good.

In all this darkness the light of grace shines. David, now (chap. ix.) at rest on his throne, the sovereign Lord of all, forms a fitting type of the blessed God, whose throne of judgment has now been made a throne of grace—the place from whence all mercy and blessing are dispensed. David enquires, “Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” The hatred and evil of Saul is not before his mind as the basis of action, but it is “for Jonathan’s sake,” the one beloved. We know surely what this signifies for us—Christ, the beloved Son, is the rule and basis of all God’s action towards the believer now—and when once this is truly apprehended, we shall be prepared for the unfolding of the wonderful thoughts and purposes of God about us.

From his exile home in Lodebar, Mephibosheth is sent for, brought *just as he is*; for all rests, not on what

he is, but on the one beloved ; and if Mephibosheth is blessed, the blessing is to express the royal pleasure in Jonathan. Amazed and confused to find himself in the king's presence, what could he more suitably say than, "What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am ?" a very low place indeed to take, but a true one. David knew all, perhaps better than he could be told ; but, after all is told, he must still be left to act according to the dictates of his own mind and heart, for he is a king, and this is the royal prerogative—as in the case of the father and the prodigal in Luke xv. It was quite right the son should say what he did, and feel it ever so deeply ; but it was equally right that the father should be allowed to gratify his own feelings in the favour and blessing he bestowed, though the object be "no more worthy."

All this speaks louder than words of the manner of God's love toward us, as well as the kind of blessing it bestows.

David's first words to Mephibosheth are, "Fear not ;" very like other first greetings in later times, for "fear hath torment," and love's first work is to take it away ; for until the fear is gone there is no preparation to listen to anything else. Then follows the unfolding of his purpose. "For I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father ; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually." Three things are here—the kindness, the inheritance, and the fellowship ; and all these have their counterpart in the present day of God's abounding grace—we stand in divine favour (Rom. v. 2 ; Eph. i. 6) ; we have an inheritance (Eph. i. ii.) ; and our fellowship. (1 John i. 3.) What a position and

what a portion is ours, who have in this day of grace submitted ourselves to the righteousness of God.

It was not only royal favour that Mephibosheth enjoyed, but in place of his alienation he is brought so near to the king as to eat bread continually at his table "as one of the king's sons;" this is exceedingly beautiful, and goes beyond the thought of the inheritance possessed. We have "in Christ" the inheritance it is true, in Him too we enter into the divine favour; but what can go higher in experimental privilege than that "our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ"? and, as with Mephibosheth, this is not a temporary or periodical privilege, but to be enjoyed continually; our whole life in its greatest and smallest details may, by the Holy Spirit, be lived so near the divine presence as to partake of this fellowship. Of no lesser interest are the subsequent allusions to Mephibosheth in 2 Sam. xvi. xix., and show the effect of grace upon the heart in the affection and self-forgetfulness there shown. It is worthy both of our study and imitation.

H. A. C.

WHY do believers go so heavily through the wilderness, going through the sand, and their feet sinking so heavily down in it? It is because they do not see that their acceptance with God is as perfect as that of Christ, that God sees all the beauty of Christ upon them, and that they will be presented by Christ to God, glorified with all His glory. I am on my road to glory, able to sing songs in the night.

G. V. W.

THE BOOK OF EZRA.

CHAP. vi. 16-22.

JEHOVAH'S house being now completed, we have in the next place the account of the dedication.

"And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, and offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin-offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses." (vv. 16-18.)

It was but natural that they should rejoice at such a moment, for the house of their God was the expression of all the blessings of the covenant in which they stood. And at length, after weary years of failure, difficulties, disappointments, and sorrow, it stood completed before their eyes. It was for this that they had been brought up out of Babylon, and if any of them had sown in tears they now reaped in joy. But their own feebleness, and the poverty of their circumstances, may be seen by contrasting this dedication with that of Solomon's temple. Then the king offered a sacrifice of twenty and two thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep, besides sheep and oxen which could not be told nor numbered for multitude, which were

sacrificed before the ark. (2 Chron. vii. 5; v. 6.) If they had dwelt on this aspect, their joy, as on laying the foundation, might well have been accompanied with lamentation and tears. Faith, however, has to do with unseen things, and it could thus recall to the mind of this feeble remnant that Jehovah was no less mighty and no less merciful for them than for Solomon. The house might be less glorious, and they themselves but poor subjects of a Gentile monarch; but if God was for them, as He was, the resources available for faith were as unbounded as ever. This truth cannot be too deeply impressed on our minds, that Christ remains the same for His people in a day of difficulty as in a season of prosperity. To be in the power of this raises us, as nothing else can, above our circumstances, and gives us courage to press onward whatever the perils of the path.

And faith was in exercise in these children of the captivity; for we find that they offered a sin-offering for all Israel. All Israel was not there—only representatives of two or three tribes; but these few were on the ground of the nation before God, and they understood this, and thus included in their sin-offering all the tribes of Israel. This is surely a significant lesson for the remnant gathered out in these last days to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They may be but few, and both poor and feeble; but, if they enter into the truth of their position, they will include in their hearts and in their prayers all the members of the one body. In spirit they will occupy the ground on which they have been set "with all the saints;" or otherwise they will but add another to the many sects which already divide the Church of God. This becomes easy when faith is in lively

exercise; for the faith that on the one hand links itself with God, on the other links itself with all His people.

They were also characterized at this moment by obedience. They regulated the service of the house—the priests and the Levites, “as it is written in the book of Moses.” The path of obedience, whether for the individual or for the assembly, is the only path of blessing. At such a time—just when the house of God was completed—it would have appeared folly to them for man to have intruded his thoughts into the house of God. Their only concern was to know what God had said—what He had directed. So was it when the house of God was built at Pentecost, in the apostolic church; and so was it when God graciously permitted the revival of the truth of the Church at the beginning of this century. But what happened after the departure of the apostles has happened again—as also with the remnant, as will be seen in the closing chapter of Ezra—that is, the word of God as the sole regulator of His house is often displaced by man for his own convenience, or for his own wisdom. No danger is more subtle than the gradual creeping into the assembly of human thoughts and arrangements in substitution for the word of God. In effect, although not so intended, it is the deposition of the Lord from His place of supremacy over His people. There never was a time, therefore, when it was more necessary to remember the words of our risen Lord: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

Following upon the dedication of the house, although actually a short interval elapsed, the passover was observed.

“And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat, and kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.” (*vv.* 19–22.)

The connection is exceedingly beautiful. The house of their God finished, His people celebrate the memorial of their redemption from the land of Egypt, and thus remind themselves, to the praise of Jehovah, of the ground on which they stood, and of the fact that the foundation of all their blessing, of all God's actings in grace towards them, was the blood of the slain Lamb. This, according to the word of Moses, “was a night to be much observed unto the Lord for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.” (*Exodus* xii. 42.) Nothing could show more distinctly that these children of the captivity were at this moment in possession of the mind of the Lord than their observance of the passover. Passing by the glories of the kingdom, they travelled upward until they reached the charter of all they possessed, whether in title or in prospect, and there confessed God as the God of their salvation. They thus built on what God was

for them on the ground of the blood of the Passover Lamb, and they found in that, as individual souls ever find, a rock which is both immutable and immovable. Their hearts were in this feast; "for," as we read, "the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure." (See Numbers ix. 16-14.) They discerned what was due to Him whose feast they kept.

There were others besides themselves who united with them in this observance—those who had "separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel." Whether these were of the few Israelites who had been left behind in the land, when their brethren were carried away captive, or whether they were of the heathen, is not mentioned. In Exodus xii. it is said, "There shall no stranger eat thereof;" but it is added, "When a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the pass-over to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it." (See also Numbers ix. 14.) They were probably therefore "strangers;" and if so, they had been attracted to the children of the captivity by witnessing the divine power that was seen in their separation from evil. Alas! we do not read of any more being thus drawn; rather the children of Israel were drawn afterwards to the heathen. It is ever the same with the people of God. When the Spirit of God works in their midst, and when, as a consequence, they walk, in any measure, according to the nature of their calling, there will always be numbers, constrained by what they behold, seeking their company and fellowship. When, on the other hand, life and power vanish, and are succeeded

by coldness and indifference, it is the world that attracts, and not the Church. Hence it is that every movement in the Church of God is most influential at the outset, because then the display of the Spirit's power is more manifest.

After the passover, they observed, according to the word of God, the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy. (See Exodus xiii.) This feast followed immediately upon the passover, and derives its special significance from it. The apostle has explained this to us. He says, "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (1 Cor. v. 7, 8.) That is, the moment we are redeemed God claims us, and He desires us to respond to His claims by holy lives—separation from evil, and separation unto Himself. The feast lasted seven days; *i.e.* a perfect period—typically, the period of our lives. Thus in the Old as in the New Testament all God's claims upon His people are founded on redemption. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price." This, whatever the change of words, is the unvarying note, and teaches the uniform lesson, everywhere repeated, that since He is holy, we are also to be holy. Leaven must not be found in our dwellings, but we are to keep the feast perpetually with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Nor should these two things be ever disjoined in teaching. If grace—grace unbounded—is displayed in our redemption, grace should be operative in the hearts of the redeemed. If God call us out of the world, it is not that we should go back to and find our home

again in the world. If by His grace we are washed in the precious blood of Christ, He surely looks that we should keep our garments undefiled. If then the memorials of our redemption are sweet to us, if we delight to be found around the Lord's table, to feast upon the emblems of His body and His blood, let us also delight to keep the feast of unleavened bread in testimony to Him who has redeemed us, and for the glory of His blessed name.

It was a time of joy to this poor remnant; for the blessing of God rested upon them, and the heart of the Gentile king was turned towards them. For a season the clouds had disappeared, and they could rest in the sunshine of heavenly and earthly favour.

Here the first part of the book closes; the remaining four chapters are occupied with the mission and work of Ezra. E. D.

IN its fullest sense repentance is when our sin is so thoroughly brought out that we are taking God's side of the question in judging ourselves, and in justifying Him. Then it is that He justifies us, and makes us accepted in the Beloved.

WE find in the Word of God that the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin, that by the blood of the cross He has made peace, that our sins and iniquities are remembered no more. Faith is the simple-hearted reception of what God has said.

THE LORD IN THE MIDST OF HIS DISCIPLES.

LUKE xxii. 19-34.

THAT which is so precious and interesting in this portion is the grouping together of so many various subjects. If you follow the order of events here, and the moral unfoldings, it is most beautiful. It begins with the greatest expression of divine life. In a certain way we begin life every week with the Lord's table. A week is the summary of one's life, and the first day of the week we begin with the death of Christ, and there is no beginning like that. After the passover is over—the celebration of that which was characteristic of Israel—He comes to that which is for us, and He does it in full view of the future. I am sure if we get right about the Lord's table we are right about all else. "This do in remembrance of me." Whatever brings our souls into close contact with Christ is a gain that will never pass away. Our great necessity is *nearness* to Christ, to have in our souls the sense of what a wondrous reality it is *to speak to Him*. To think that people walking through this world may know that just as really as the disciples could speak to the Lord down here, *we* may speak to Him. I do not know anything to compare to it—His ear ever open to me, His heart ever open to me, and the Spirit ever willing to conduct my soul into His presence; but it is a greater thing for Him to speak to me.

"This do in remembrance of me" has a peculiar claim on us. He was about to undergo death, and yet

there He is in all quietness and calmness saying, "This do in remembrance of me." How differently a person goes out on a Sunday morning to the other days of the week! Where are you going? I am going to meet the Saviour, according to His own desire, and everything else sinks into utter nothingness. There is no *routine* in it. Could there be routine in worship, adoration, bowing of the heart, and the satisfaction that takes a person out of the world? If there is a hymn sung it is worship; if there is silence it should be the silence of adoration. I go and sit down and wait till I have the sense that the Lord is there, and that is *everything*. It is not repetition. There is no such thing in God's ways with us as repetition. We never pass through two circumstances alike. We are walking to heaven as straight as we can go. In the pathway every circumstance is new, and fresher in divine blessing than before, and there is so much there to take in that we shall never get to the end of it. But I press the solemn, blessed joy of being able to speak to Christ. Often we pray, and do not get the sense of being near to Him; and then I think the thing is to persevere, and get out of the distractions until the Spirit of God takes us into the quiet place, and we sit down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit is sweet to our taste. When a person is with Christ, and has really got Christ, there really is not room for other things.

Here (v. 23) when the disciples come out for a moment, they are disturbed at the thought that there is to be a betrayer. John xiii. tells us how the secret is known that there was to be a betrayer, and *there*. This is a most expressive verse—"Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom He spake."

Immediately after there is a strife among them which should be the greatest; that is *self* pure and simple. It is that kind of working which we have to judge in this day. There was the Son of God, the Lord of glory, going to give Himself for them, for ever to displace from before God's eye that which was unsuitable to Him, and there *they* are making themselves objects of consideration. They were objects of suspicion in the previous verse, now objects of consideration. John the Baptist is a beautiful contrast to them. He calls himself nothing but a "voice," and if we are anything else but voices it is all over with us. It is a beautiful thing to be a voice, and we are only voices *for* Christ, as the voice *of* Christ is the joy of our hearts.

This is the most humiliating picture of man's heart. Immediately after the table where His love is displayed, then they strive which should be the greatest. When you get near to Christ you feel as if every shred of yourself was gone. Verse 25 shows what goes on in the world; but verse 26 shows that Christianity is the total and entire opposite of it. It is beautiful, the moral condition of soul that takes a person into the place of being nothing, and glad to be in obscurity. The more we are with Christ, the more we welcome obscurity, and He knows; that is enough. The soul that goes on with Christ can say, "Well, I am content to be nothing;" but this verse 26 is open to us because it is service, and the way He remedies their departure in that day is the way He remedies it for us in this day. We never remedy anyone but by setting Christ before them. "I am among you as He that serveth." Service is where we get tried; but when we are with Christ, nothing but the lowest place will

do for us. The moral order here is so beautiful; first the table, then service. Nothing can disturb Christ's love; but what it must have been to Him to see His disciples like this. But He removes the entire thing in a moment when He says, "I am among you as He that serveth."

First, we have the full expression of divine love in the supper, and the request of divine affection; the greatest love shown, and the greatest grace in asking them to do something for Him. There is nothing He cares for so much as the affections of His people. Then He comes down and sees that these loved ones are at issue among themselves as to who should be the greatest. He corrects that by the revelation of Himself, and by doing this He displaces self. We are never displaced but by Christ. Then He says, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations." The moment the heart reaches what Christ was, immediately He says everything He can in their favour. He rebukes them solemnly first for their selfishness, and shows them that the very opposite marks Christianity—"Ye shall not be so," and then He unfolds the true principle of service. Because He loves them, He delights to say everything He can in their favour. He delights to say all He can for each of us; and when we stand before the judgment-seat, He will surprise us. Little things we had forgotten He will remember and bring up in our favour. What a set they were, these disciples, a company of men one would look down upon. That is the best company Christ had in this world. But it brings out what He is. Is this the kind of Christ you have to do with? He will say everything He can for me, He will not pick all the

holes He can find in me. It is the sense of the *love* of that Christ who looks over my pathway here. He knows what a bungler I am. But He cheers us and helps us and puts the best motive for all we do; and when we get home, will He not surprise us?

And now think what a moment it was for Him; think of the surroundings in which He was—sorrow and rejection, and those waiting outside to drag Him away to death; and yet He speaks about the *kingdom*. (v. 29.) The kingdom was *present* to Him, and He says, "I appoint unto you a kingdom." Only a man in power and position can talk about appointing. There never was a brighter day for us than the present; but it must be faith. Faith makes what is on before present; it makes the kingdom present, and the light of that future is enough. You never found a man strong and vigorous in Christianity who was not living in the light of the future. Put yourselves in company with the disciples, and say, How are things with us? The very men who were appointed a kingdom forsook Christ and fled. First, we want personal acquaintance with Christ, and then, there must be the acceptance of identification with Christ in rejection. We talk about the Church and house of God; but if a person is not in spirit identified with a rejected Christ, the Church is all Greek to him. No soul has ever taken in the truth of the Church that is not in identification with Christ in rejection. The Church is a heavenly thing. Do you know you are one with Christ outside this world? that there is a breach between Christ and the world, and are you with Him?

Verse 30 is worth looking at. Eating at His table is the highest thing; sitting on thrones is more for judg-

ment. Intercourse with Christ in the day of glory coming. It would be a terrible thing not to be true to Christ *now*. Let us rise up, and go straight on. Satan will try to hinder, and we get Satanic power here. (v. 31.) There you find Satan, and what he brings against the soul, and then Christ's priestly service praying for us. To think that the Lord knows every tactic of Satan. He is above them all, and sees their working towards me. We have not an *inactive Christ* in heaven, but one who cares for us, and watches over us every moment of our lives. What a moment it is for the soul when it can say, "Lord, I know Thou art sufficient; Thou wilt help me through." To know I am an object of consideration in heaven. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of those whose heart is perfect towards Him." There is nothing like Christianity. A Saviour in heaven, with boundless, measureless resources, who is going to do everything for me. "I have a rich Almighty Friend."

"When thou art restored, strengthen thy brethren." (v. 32.) It is beautiful to see how the Lord contemplates the blessing of His people. He does not say, "When you are restored, take care you do not fall again," but, "When thou art restored, *strengthen thy brethren.*" That is what Christ cares about. You must learn from failure; but when you are restored, strengthen the brethren. That is our business, and we cannot strengthen each other but by the ministry of Christ. "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing [blessing there means the ministry of blessing]; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing." (1 Peter iii. 9.) We are

going to inherit it, we *do* inherit it, and our only business is to minister it.

The one thing we need is to get near to Christ. Can I *speak* to Him? Can I be as near to Him as John or Peter were, and have intercourse with Him? What a wonderful thing! And how *He* values it and loves it! If we are taking the ground of self-sufficiency (*v.* 33), God has to put us to the proof. The first thing is to be so at home and at rest in Christ's presence, that He has no question to put to me. It is no good thinking about service if there is a question between me and Christ. Peter had to learn himself. The higher thing is not to learn oneself by faults, because if I rightly accept the cross of Christ, I accept the very worst about myself. If we have learnt the cross, we have learnt the worst about ourselves.

E. P. C.

I NEVER had my heart occupied with a living Christ in heaven without finding that His love drew my affections after Him. I never grew careless without there being cold chills. If occupied with Him, you will not be thinking of yourself, your walk, your beauty, or anything except the love which draws the heart after Him. I can give no reason why my heart was wrapped round Christ, save that the grace of God drew me to Him, and has kept me these forty years; because He loved me, and will love me to the end. Peter cursed and swore, and denied the Lord, but the Lord had bound Peter to Himself, and He kept him to the end.

G. V. W.

SCRIPTURE NOTES.

I.

1 TIMOTHY v. 20.

THERE are three questions to be answered in regard to this scripture if we would apprehend its precise meaning. The first is, Who are indicated by "them that sin" (*τοὺς ἁμαρτάνοντας*)? It has been thought by some, from the connection, that they might be elders. Thus "against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin," etc.; *i.e.* as has been contended, if any of the elders were proved to have sinned, they were to be rebuked before all. A careful examination, however, of the exact form of the apostle's language leads to the conclusion that it is more general that, to speak accurately, it is a class; viz., those who sin, whether elders or otherwise, that all in the assembly who sin are to be dealt with in the way specified. The second question is, What is meant by the words "rebuke before all"? The word "rebuke" is the same as found, for example, in John xvi. 8, where it is translated "reprove." "And when He" (the Comforter) "is come, He will reprove the world of sin," etc. In both cases the more exact rendering would be "convict." The very fact of the presence of the Comforter on earth "convicts" the world of sin—in the rejection and crucifixion of Christ. So in our passage, those that sin are to be "convicted" before all. To enter into the meaning of this, it must be remembered that this scripture in nowise militates

against other passages which afford guidance for dealing privately with believers who fall into sin. These divinely-given directions always retain their force; and here the apostle is furnishing Timothy with instruction as to the treatment of "those that sin" when other means have failed; as, for example, in Matthew xviii., where the Lord teaches us how to act in respect of a brother who trespasses against us. First, we are to speak to him alone. If this does not succeed, we are to take one or two more with us. If he will not hear them, we are to "tell it unto the church," etc. In like manner those that sin are to be convicted before all after other means for their restoration have been adopted. The question then returns—What is it to convict them before all? It is to demonstrate their sin before all in such a way as to bring it home to their consciences, with the object of leading them to confession and restoration. It is thus a work of power in the Spirit to convict them that sin before the assembly—it may be by facts—to convict them in their conscience before God, by showing out the character of their sin, and thus producing real humiliation, contrition, and self-judgment. The third question is, On whom does this blessed work devolve? It is not a precept for the assembly any more than the appointment of bishops and deacons. It is rather an apostolic charge to Timothy himself; so that it was Timothy who was to act in the way described. What then would answer to this now? If a brother, on whose heart the Lord has laid a true pastoral care for His people, and one who had sought in every possible way to reach the conscience of any who had sinned but had failed, were to rise, as led of the Holy Spirit in the assembly, and convict them in the presence of

all, he would be acting on the principle of this scripture. From the very nature of the precept it could not be a collective responsibility nor a delegated duty, but wholly and entirely an individual act; and an individual act only when done in the power of the Holy Ghost.

II.

PSALM CXXXVI.

This Psalm opens with what may be termed the refrain of Israel's national song—at least from the time of Solomon's temple (see 2 Chron. v. 13); and the song which proclaims that "His mercy endureth for ever" is surely a song for eternity. And it is exceedingly beautiful to notice how the Psalmist connects the mercy of the Lord with the whole of Israel's relationships and history. Thus in verses 2-4 it flows from what God is as the God of gods, the Lord of lords, and as the doer of great wonders; *i.e.* what God is in His absolute supremacy, and in His almighty power. From verses 5-9 God as Creator is celebrated, and for His mercy. Next it is as Redeemer. (*vv.* 10-15.) And whether it be in judgment upon Egypt, bringing Israel out with a strong hand and a stretched-out arm, or in the overthrow of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, it is the thought of His enduring mercy that fills the hearts of His people, and produces their song. So in every subsequent stage of their history. Thus, in verse 16, the ascription is to Him who led His people through the wilderness; in verses 17-20, to Him who delivered them from their foes by the way; and then, in verses 21, 22, who put them in possession of their land. The One who had brought them out had also brought them

in, for His mercy endureth for ever. The next two verses (23, 24) sum up all the past. God had remembered His people in their low estate (in Egypt), and had redeemed them from all their enemies, from that time until in the enjoyment of their heritage. And verse 25 looks onward to the millennium, and anticipates the supply of the need of all flesh, when mercy will be the theme of their song—as much then as now. The Psalm concludes with celebrating the God of heaven—God in the universal range of His power and authority. And still it is, “His mercy endureth for ever.”

Thus from first to last, and during all the interval from first to last, in creation (and *we* can go further back still—even to God’s purposes of grace in Christ before the foundation of the world), in our redemption, our guidance through the wilderness, our deliverance from our enemies, our being put into possession of all that God has secured for us in Christ, whether now, or when we are for ever with the Lord, it is and will be nothing but mercy, so that we may adopt Israel’s song, and cry unceasingly, “O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever.” E. D.

III.

2 CORINTHIANS xii. 9.

The first sentence of this verse is sometimes overlooked—“*He said unto me.*” Paul got it from Christ. *You* may tell me that Christ is sufficient, but I must get it myself personally from Christ in heaven, and that will assure my heart. If we want to be delivered from ourselves, or from whatever difficulties may be

in our pathway, He is sufficient. The result is, "*Most gladly therefore* will I rather glory in my infirmities." He besought the Lord thrice to take away the thorn before, but now a communication from Christ has altered everything; the voice of Christ alters everything. There is no third party here; it is not He and us, but *He* and *me*. I do not mean anything imaginative, only the simplicity of intercourse with Christ about everything in our pathway. "That the power of Christ may overshadow me, tabernacle over me." For the saint of God who walks in conscious weakness and powerlessness there is an invisible power overshadowing him all the pathway through. I believe we often want to get up power like getting up steam. It must be perpetual weakness, but perpetual power. Christ says I can do anything I like there; that is the state He wants in us.

E. P. C.

IV.

1 JOHN v. 8.

There seems to be here (in the witness that eternal life is in the Son, not in Adam) a double testimony: the water and the blood, which tell of death, the breach with all of the first man, that not till Christ was dead, or otherwise than by death, was there cleansing; the Spirit, witness of life according to the glory of the second Adam. Life is in the Son; but the Son, as man on the cross, has come in the midst of the whole thing, has been rejected, and has died, and died for atonement and cleansing. But the Son is also glorified Man, and and as such Head of the new thing in power.

J. N. D.

"AN ACCEPTABLE TIME."

ISAIAH xlix. 8.

ALL things which the Lord doeth are known from eternity. (See Acts xv. R.V.) He is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. If He unfolds to us His way, of which He is the Beginning, in Genesis; He also is shown to be the End of it in Revelation. Moreover, one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. One is led to the remembrance of these scriptures in meditating on such a passage as the one before us. In the first three verses of the chapter, Christ, by the Spirit of prophecy, takes His place as in the midst of Israel, and states what Jehovah's purpose was as to them: "Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." But by the same Spirit He declares, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain." This was the result of His seeking fruit on the fig tree of Israel during the three years of His ministry. Nor did the further digging about it and dunging it avail (Luke xiii. 7, 8); for Israel was not gathered, as His words in verse 34 testify: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" Still He could say, "Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my reward" (margin, see also Revised Version) "with my God." And what a reward it was! He will yet, as Jehovah's Servant, raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the preserved of Israel; but that

alone were a light thing. He is given for a light to the Gentiles, that He may be Jehovah's salvation unto the end of the earth.

Here we may pause to consider what had to take place ere this could be accomplished. He, the One whom man despiseth, whom the nation abhorreth, must take the place of rejection and death. We learn this from His reply to Philip, when the Greeks came and "desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus." Then the truth is announced: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Jesus must die and rise again. In the days of His flesh, He offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared. But there was a moment when He was not only despised and rejected of men, but forsaken of God; when He could not say, "As for me, my prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time" (Psalm lxix. 13); when His utterance was, "I cry, but thou hearest not." This moment of unutterable woe must be passed through, and it was passed through in atonement for our sins; and then He was heard from the horns of the unicorns. He who in grace gave Himself up to die, and in dying bore the holy judgment of God, could not be delivered from all the sorrow and evil that pressed upon Him until, transfixed upon the cross, that judgment had been endured; then He who was crucified in weakness was raised by the power of God. Hence Jehovah can now say to Him in resurrection, "In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee." Jesus has Himself been heard out of

the depths, and succoured on the ground of full atonement made. But there is yet more; for Jehovah adds, "I will preserve thee, and give Thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth" (or the land), "and to cause to inherit the desolate heritages." Thus a flood-tide of blessing will be poured out to the nation that rejected Him. Jesus is preserved, treasured up in the heavens now, awaiting the moment of the ingathering of Israel.

But let me ask the reader, What is it that comes in between the paragraphs of verse 8—between Christ's being heard in an acceptable time, and then given for a covenant of the people (Israel)? Cannot we tell of the deep purposes of love which lay hidden in the close of the first paragraph, and now which are unfolded in Him who is preserved in the heavens? 2 Cor. vi. 2 tells us that "now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." Who among Old Testament saints, that read of Messiah's being personally heard in an accepted time and succoured in a day of salvation, and dimly saw that Israel's coming forth from the north and west, and from the land of Sinim, depended upon it, could have known that there would be a people who would be accepted in His acceptance, who would be saved in His own salvation from out of death and judgment, who would be able to say that by His resurrection they were risen with Him? And not only so; but now that He is treasured in the heavens, they too are kept as in Him. "Because I live, ye shall live also." And again, "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me." None could have told what was bound up in the first half of this precious verse, had not the Spirit of God,

by Paul, made it known to us in beseeching us not to receive the grace of God in vain. "I have heard thee in a time of acceptance" was addressed by Jehovah to Christ personally. The Spirit of God has made us acquainted that we, through grace, are now included in "Thee." The reason is given in chap. v. 21: "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." May we heed the exhortation to the Corinthians, not to receive the grace of God in vain.

T. H. R.

THE COMING OF THE COMFORTER.

JOHN xiv. 15-31.

THE second part of this chapter—the power that is in us—begins at verse 15. The Lord says, "I can't stay, but I will send you One who will abide with you." The Holy Ghost is only known by being in us. Christ was before them, they could see Him. Every thing that came out from Christ to the world was the manifestation of God, His words and His works, and the world was called on to believe that He was there the blessed testimony of the goodness of God in the midst of their needs and their wretchedness, and they would not have Him. That's not the way with the Comforter—they can't see Him. Fruits ought to be shown; but no *person* is manifested. When the Holy Ghost came down, there was power that struck them, and fruits of grace where the Spirit works, which are a deeper testimony; for a wicked man can do a miracle, or a dumb ass speak, if God choose. Therefore He is only known where He dwells. The effect of the

Spirit is, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you." The Holy Ghost brings Christ to our hearts, and He dwells in our hearts. "The world sees me no more; but ye see me;" and mark what it is connected with, "Because I live, ye shall live also." The power of divine life was triumphant over death, and where a person believed on Him, Christ is brought, through the presence and power of the Spirit, to that man's heart much closer and nearer than if He were on earth. Not that the eye sees Him; but He says, "I am going to be with you and in you, in a far better way, that the world can't see or know." The Holy Ghost testifies to the world of all this; but He is not here to be received by the world, but is given to those who believe, and the moment He is given He brings Christ down to the heart. Our immediate intercourse with Christ is established. He comes to us by the power and presence of the Holy Ghost. The One who "loved me, and gave Himself for me," that He might redeem me by blood, and who has washed me in His blood, and done everything for me—I have got *Him*. A poor vessel I am for Him to dwell in, but when we are cleansed by the blood, fit for God, He comes and dwells in me. How far do all our souls know that? He has not left me comfortless, He *has* come; I know what it is to have Christ, to hear His voice. In the world I have tribulation, but I know what it is to have peace in Him. "Ye see me: and because I live, ye shall live also." He is in us, the power of eternal life, and He must die before I die. The life I have got is, "Not I, but Christ lives in me." What a thing to be able to say! He has overcome death, broken all its bands. He lives as *man*; and if He lives as triumphant over it all, I shall live also. How blessed

to have it from His own lips, anxious to have us happy! He says, "Don't be uneasy, I am going to prepare a place for you, and meantime I will come to you and reveal myself to you. I will not leave you comfortless."

"At that day ye shall know," &c. (v. 20.) The believer knows the Lord Jesus Christ. The lowly man down here, has gone up there, and he sees himself in Christ, and Christ in himself. We get the consciousness of standing before God and before the world. I have a place—what a place!—in Christ, where the Father's delight is; delight in His obedience, His perfection, His glorifying God; a place in Christ Himself, with the affections that flow from it: "My Father and your Father, my God and your God." We get at the same time, beloved friends, what we are before the world. If I am in Christ, He is in me, and what I have to do is to manifest the life of Christ, that others may see Christ in my walk and ways and spirit. What a blessing to be able to say, "I know I am in Christ, and He is in me," as to present relationship. It is God's delight to make us sons with Christ; and His work is so perfect in cleansing us, that the Holy Ghost can come and give us the consciousness of it—it makes us heavenly in our ways. We have seen that we know the place we are going to, we know the way, we know the Father and the Son, and now we get that, in order to have the present consciousness of it, we have the Holy Ghost.

Now He takes up the practical realization of it: obedience is the path. Not only He dwells in me and comforts me, but there is manifestation in the path of obedience. The characteristic of those that love Him will be obedience. (v. 21.) When we get to

this close relationship, the sign of love is knowing the wishes of the person you love. Where Christ is precious, there is attentiveness. It is not, "*Can I do this?*" but, "*Is it pleasing to Him?*" Many Christians have not His commandments. Why? Because they have something else. If we had an *open ear*—waken, my ear, morning by morning—we should have His commandments, we should know His mind, and what He wishes. I can find out the wishes of my father if I am thoughtful and attentive. He that has them, and keeps them not, is worse, of course. He that loves Him gets the "*secret of the Lord.*" There are Christians who do not get the manifestation of the delight and favour of Christ; but there it is for them. We are very feeble; but the Lord's heart is true if our hearts are not; and if we loved Him, we should want to have things according to His wish and mind, and that only; if I could please Him I should be satisfied, and should have the present enjoyment of Christ because my heart was walking in obedience. There is the anticipation of what is heavenly when walking in this path. The Father and the Son come and make their abode with us. (v. 23.) How little we have this manifestation! The Lord's heart is on them, they can't be happy here; but they are to look for the blessedness of being with the Father, and "*we will come and abide in you, till you can come and abide with us;*" but it must be in this path.

Mark what He says in verse 27. He has not only made peace, but "*my peace I give unto you,*" as He always does; He has brought us into the same place with Himself. What was the peace of Christ? He was here in uninterrupted intercourse with the Father,

carrying His joy with Him. He had "meat to eat they knew not of," joy where all were rejecting Him—the peace of perfect communion. Christ puts us into His place, and we have fellowship with the Father; and when we walk in that, we have this peace of Christ, like Matthew xi. 29. Where the will is broken, we have the peace of the man who has no will but the will of Christ, keeping His commandments, nothing disturbing communion. The saint passing through this world in obedience and communion, where there is no self-will, walks in peacefulness, the peace that Christ had! His love will give us all He had; the same place as sons by grace, the same place in heaven, in the glory. His heart is bent on blessing us. He may chasten us if necessary; but He gives the consciousness of being in Him and He in us. The world gives liberally; but it gives away. Christ never does; He brings us into the enjoyment of what He enjoys. Because His love is perfect, He brings us where He is Himself, and His delight is that we are enjoying it.

One more thought, which perhaps is the most wonderful of all: the way Christ shows how completely His heart has associated itself with us, and us with it. We worship Him as the One who is worthy of all worship, but inasmuch as He has exercised love to us, He associates us with Himself, and expects us to rejoice in His happiness. (*v.* 28.) What a place to give us! To be able to say, "I am happy because He is glorified;" our hearts *satisfied* that Christ, who has loved us and made us happy, is contented! We see Him in the glory due to Him, and we are satisfied! He says, "If you think of yourselves, you are sorry; but if you were thinking of me, you would be delighted." He

expects us to be glad in His happiness! Are our hearts there? So resting in the fulness of His work, having His peace and joy in this world, that we can be interested in His glory? Do you accept that place as to the state of your hearts? He has purchased a "peculiar people, to be zealous of good works." He has brought you to Himself, to have your whole heart wrapped up in His interests, your thoughts, actions, everything for Him. I am sure we shall feel our weakness; but are we living enough out of the world (not merely out of its *pleasures*, but its *cares*), and enough with Christ, for Him to have a large place in the daily thoughts of our hearts? The more my eye is open on His unspeakable blessedness, the weaker I am; but have we the consciousness from the time we get up in the morning till we go to bed at night, that our hearts are *with Christ*, as redeemed ones in the place we are going to—a consciousness that He is in us, and we identified with Him? The Holy Ghost is given that we may know what a place it is. The Lord give us diligence of heart to feed on Him, and get our hearts associated with Him, that we may find not only contrast with this evil world, but also know the place into which He has brought us before His Father.

J. N. D.

THE sinner is first converted, then purified by the blood of Christ, and finally sealed by the Holy Ghost. Through Him we are fully assured of sharing in an accomplished redemption by virtue of our blessed relationship to God and to Christ, as He is the earnest of "the future" glory. But all flows from the sprinkling of the blood of Christ.

THE BOOK OF EZRA.

CHAPTER vii.

WE now enter upon the second part of this book. In the first part, the return of the people from Babylon and the building of the temple are narrated; and in the second we have the personal mission and the work of Ezra. It should again be noticed that the signs of the transference of governmental power in the earth from the Jew to the Gentile are everywhere apparent. Thus the date of Ezra's mission is given as "in the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia," and indeed his commission for his work from the king is given at length (*vv.* 11-26), in proof that God's people were at this time under the authority of the Gentiles, and that God Himself ever recognizes the powers which have their source in His own sovereign appointment.

It may aid the reader if the structure of chapters vii. and viii. is first briefly indicated. After Ezra's genealogy (*chap.* vii. 1-5) a short summary is given of the king's permission for him to go, of his journey up to Jerusalem, and of the object of his mission. (*vv.* 6-10.) Then follows the king's letter, conferring upon Ezra authority to act, as well as the necessary powers for the execution of his work. (*vv.* 11-26.) This chapter closes with Ezra's ascription of praise to God for having inclined the heart of the king to Jehovah's temple, and for having extended mercy to himself before the king, &c. (*vv.* 27, 28.) In chapter viii. 1-14 we have a catalogue of those who voluntarily availed themselves of the royal permission to go up from Babylon with Ezra.

All these having been assembled by "the river that runneth to Ahava," Ezra, finding that none of the sons of Levi were there, took measures to secure "ministers for the house of our God." (*vv.* 15-20.) All being thus prepared, two things follow; first, fasting and supplication before God (*vv.* 21-23); and secondly, the appointment of twelve of the chief of the priests to take charge of the silver, the gold, and the vessels which had been offered for "the house of our God." (*vv.* 24-30.) Lastly, we have the journey, and the arrival at Jerusalem, together with the necessary preparations for the commencement of Ezra's work. (*vv.* 31-36.)

It will thus be seen that chapters vii. and viii. should be read together, forming as they do a continuous narrative, of which chapter vii. 1-10 is the preface or introduction.

The genealogy of Ezra is traced back to Aaron. (*vv.* 1-5.) He was one therefore entitled to all the rights and privileges of the priesthood (see chap. ii. 62); and, moreover, he was a ready scribe in the law of his God, and thereby qualified to be the instructor of the people in the statutes of Jehovah. (See Lev. x. 8-11; Mal. ii. 4-7.) He became a priest by birth and consecration; but he only became "a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given," by personal study of the Word. Inherited office therefore, even with the Jews, could not bestow the qualifications for its exercise—these could only come from individual converse with God in the Scriptures; for while by virtue of consecration the priest was entitled by grace to minister before God, he could only minister acceptably when all was done in obedience to the Word, and it was impossible that he could teach unless he himself

were acquainted with the mind of God. It was neglect of this second part of their office that led to the failure and corruption of the priesthood; for so completely was the word of God forgotten in the days of Josiah, that the finding of a copy of the law in the temple became an epoch in his reign.

It is therefore of surpassing interest—like finding a beautiful flower in the midst of a sandy desert—to discover in Ezra one who, while he cherished his priestly descent, found his joy and strength in the law of his God; and in verse 10 the secret of his attainments is unfolded. He had “prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it.” Let the reader ponder this significant and instructive statement—“He had prepared his heart.” So the apostle prayed for the Ephesian believers, that “the eyes of their heart” (heart is the right reading) might be enlightened, that they might know what is the hope of His calling, &c. (Chap. i. 18.) Yes, it is to the heart that the revelations of God are made, even as it was to the heart of the Magdalene that the Lord manifested Himself at the sepulchre, rather than to the intelligence of His disciples. Nor can we attach too much importance to this truth. Preparation of heart (and this also cometh from the Lord) is everything, whether for the study of the Word, for prayer, or for worship. (See 1 Cor. viii. 1-3; Heb. x. 22; 1 John iii. 20-23.)

There is yet another thing. If Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, it was first and foremost that he might *do it*. It was not therefore to increase his knowledge, to add to his repute as a teacher; but it was that his heart, life, and ways might be formed by it—that his own walk might be the embodiment of the

truth, and thus well-pleasing to the Lord. Then followed teaching, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments. This order can never be neglected with impunity; for where teaching does not flow out of a heart that is itself subject to the truth, it is not only powerless to influence others, but it will also harden the heart of the teacher himself. This is the secret of many a failure in the Church of God. The saints are ever and anon startled by the sudden departure from the truth, or by the fall, of those who had occupied the place of teachers; but whenever the state of the heart is overlooked, and the activity of mind is permitted upon divine things, the soul is exposed to some of Satan's most subtle temptations. A true teacher should be able in measure, like Paul, to point to his own example, and to say, as he did to the Thessalonians, "Ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake." (See also Acts xx. and Phil. iii.)

It is evident, moreover, that Ezra was in communion with the mind of God as to His people. His heart was upon them; for we learn that he had sought permission of the king to go up to Jerusalem, and that "the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him." (v. 6.) What he desired, therefore, was the welfare, the blessing of his people, the people of his God, but being under subjection to the king, he had to obtain his leave; for the Lord will not have us, even for His own service, slight the authority under which we are placed. If, however, the Lord had put the desire to serve Him in the heart of Ezra, He will influence the king to answer His servant's request. How good it is to leave ourselves in His hands! We are tempted oftentimes to overleap the barriers which

man may place in our path, to force open the doors which the hand of man may have closed; but it is for our comfort and strength to remember that the Lord can make His way plain before our face whenever He wills, and that our part is to quietly wait on Him, ready to go forward when He shall speak the word. The recognition of the hand of God upon him was a characteristic of this devoted servant (see verse 9; chap. viii. 18, 22, 31, &c.), and it was at once the source both of his patience and of his courage.

The details of the journey, of which we have a short account in verses 7-9, will occupy us in the next chapter; and hence we may pass at once to the king's letter of authorization to Ezra—a letter which empowered him to act, defined the object of his mission, and provided, through the king's treasurers beyond the river, the means for the execution of his service in connection with the ordering of the house of Jehovah.

First, after the salutation—a salutation which shows that Ezra was a true witness in the midst of the Gentiles—the king decrees that “all they of the people of Israel, and of His priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee.” (v. 13.) Cyrus, as seen in chap. i., had also accorded the same privilege; and now, after the lapse of many years, once again the Spirit of God works, through the king, to deliver His people. But no human constraint was to be exercised: if any man went up, it must be voluntarily; for God would have willing servants. If under constraint, it must be only that of the Holy Spirit. Then, from verses 14-20, the scope and objects of Ezra's mission are carefully defined even as to its details. He was “sent of the

king, and his seven counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand." (v. 14.) He was, further, to take charge of the silver and gold which the king and his counsellors had freely offered to the God of Israel, also of that found in the province of Babylon, together with the free-will offering of the people, &c.; and this was to be expended in the purchase of animals, for sacrifice, &c., or as Ezra and his brethren might decide, "after the will of their God."

The reader may gather the particulars of Ezra's commission for himself. His attention, however, may be directed to one or two of its instructive features. It cannot fail to be observed that this Gentile monarch refers everything to the will of God, or, to speak more exactly, that he directs that all should be ordered in subjection to that will. It would almost seem, Gentile though he was, that he was in full fellowship with the object of Ezra; and from the confession of Jehovah as the God of heaven (vv. 21-23), it is not impossible that grace had visited his heart. Whether this were so or not, he carefully provides for the execution of Ezra's mission in every possible way, and at the same time entrusted Ezra with the government of his people "after the wisdom of God." Finally, penalties were attached to disobedience to the law of God and to the law of the king, rising even to death itself. The lesson lies on the surface that God is sovereign in the choice of His instruments, and that He doeth according to His will among the inhabitants of the earth as in the army of heaven, and that none can stay His hand or say unto Him, What doest thou? An illustration of this is found in our chapter in that "Artaxerxes, king of kings,"

and "Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of God," are yoked together for the execution of God's thoughts for His people and for His house in Jerusalem.

Ezra himself is filled with adoration as he contemplates the wonder-working power of the hand of his God; for having recorded the letter of the king, he breaks out into an ascription of praise: "Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem: and hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes." (*vv.* 27, 28.) He adds, "And I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me." In this he showed himself to be a true man of faith; he traced everything up to God. He lost sight of himself, and to his soul God was all and in all. It was thus not his request (*v.* 6) that induced the king to act, but it was God who put the thing into the king's heart; it was not Ezra's influence that commended him to the king and his princes, but it was God that extended mercy to him in their presence; it was not in his own power that he assembled the chief men to go up with him, but it was God who strengthened him with His own hand upon him. In all this he is a striking example to every believer; and happy is he who, like Ezra, has learned to live in the presence of God, to look beyond the actions of men to the power that controls them all, and to receive all, favour or persecution, aids or hindrances, from the Lord. That soul has acquired the secret of perfect peace amid the confusion and turmoil of the world, as well as in the presence of Satan's power. E. D.

OUR ALTAR.

“We have an altar.”—HEB. xiii. 10.

IN olden time an altar was the usual way of approach to God. It might be simply connected with calling on the name of the Lord, as we find in Abraham; or it might be for offering sacrifices, as was done by Noah and others.

The altar had a central place among the children of Israel; for whole burnt-offerings, meat-offerings, peace-offerings, and sin-offerings were there presented to God. Blood too was put upon the horns of the altar, sprinkled upon it, round about it, and poured out at the bottom of the altar. The altar of burnt-offering was thus a connecting-link between the people and Jehovah; that which was done in service with it, while it was blessedly typical and instructive to us, was of a kind suited to a people who were outside the veil—a people in the flesh, with an earthly calling and hope, and outside the holiest of all, the place of God’s presence.

The people were so identified with the altar that certain parts of some of the offerings thus presented to God were to be eaten. Hence we read, “Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?” (1 Cor. x. 18.) This was *their altar*, and their jealousy was properly stirred if anything seemed to interfere with THE ALTAR for all Israel; for they knew that by it they were remarkably connected with Jehovah. When on one occasion the

other tribes heard that the Reubenites had built an altar on the borders of Jordan—"a great altar to see to"—they were greatly alarmed, and severely censured them, because it appeared to be divisive of the one nation, and to rival the one altar which was for all the people who formed the one family of Israel; and they were only satisfied by the Reubenites assuring them that they had not built an altar by Jordan for offering sacrifices thereon, but for a witness. They said, "God forbid that we should rebel against the Lord, and turn this day from following the Lord, to build an altar for burnt-offerings, for meat-offerings, or for sacrifices, *beside the altar of the Lord our God* that is before His tabernacle." (Josh. xxii. 29.) It is clear then that Israel had an altar, and that altar was *the* altar of Jehovah their God, with whom they were in covenant relationship.

We see also in the days of Ezra the prominent place which was given to *the altar* when the children of Israel returned from their captivity. It was the *first* thing they set up, as if they could not approach God, or be connected with Him, on any other ground. We are told they "buildd THE ALTAR of the Lord God of Israel, to offer burnt-offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. And they set THE ALTAR upon his bases . . . and they offered burnt-offerings thereon unto Jehovah." (Ezra iii. 2, 3.)

But Israel's altar was associated with many and oft-repeated offerings which could never "take away sins." There was, therefore, the bringing of sins continually to remembrance, without giving remission, so that the conscience was not purged. The worshippers too, even Aaron's sons, the priests, could not draw near, could not

enter into the holiest of all, because the veil was up, to show that no one even of those who were connected with the altar and partakers of the sacrifices could enter into God's presence. They were thus at a distance from God. These sons of Aaron, with all their privileges, notwithstanding the exalted office they held, the garments for glory and for beauty divinely given them, and all the grandeur of the ritual system in which they occupied so important a position, could not with all have a purged conscience, or have access into the place of God's presence. The high priest only, and that not without blood and incense, could go there and live, and that only once in a whole year. This ritual system of altar, sacrifices, and priests, with its worldly sanctuary, though of divine origin, was of an earthly order, and shadowed good things to come. The many and oft-repeated sacrifices could not give a perfect conscience, because they could not take away sins. The veil standing, and an order of priesthood between God and the people, showed, as well as their altar with many and oft-repeated sacrifices, that the people were at a distance from God, and had not "access with confidence."

But we Christians have an altar, and our altar is very different from Israel's. Those who are outside the veil have no authority to eat at the altar we have. It is impossible that it should be so; for it is for those who know that the veil has been rent from the top to the bottom, and that the Forerunner has for us entered, after having appeared here to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, so that now we have liberty by faith to be inside the veil in the very presence of God, without a fear, by the blood of Jesus, and that for

communion and worship. "We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle." Our altar then is inside the veil; it is our way of approach to God. As the blood upon the mercy-seat typically set forth that sins had been judged, that all the propitiatory value of the sacrifice was always before God, as well as the merits of Christ in the perfume of the sweet incense, so He both invites and welcomes us there where He is, who entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. Our altar then is not seen, but blessedly known to faith. It is connected only with one sacrifice, which was offered once for all, and because of its everlasting value need never to be repeated. Its eternal efficacy is ever before God; by it the believer's conscience is purged, so that he can be in God's presence as a purged worshipper. Wondrous privilege! By this one offering he is sanctified or set apart for God, and "perfected for ever." The infinite value of this one sacrifice for sins is also known by the fact that the One who offered it is sitting down in perpetuity on the right hand of God. "There remaineth therefore no more sacrifice for sins."

The presence of the Saviour now in the glory of God, who was once the Sin-bearer on the cross, plainly proves that our sins have been taken away for ever. God, whose holiness demanded that the Sin-bearer should be forsaken, and who unsparingly poured out upon Him the judgment due for our sins, not only raised Him from among the dead for our justification, but gave Him the highest place in glory at His own right hand as alone adequate for what He had done as having glorified God in the earth, and having finished the work which He gave Him to do. The rending of

the veil was also God's way of showing us His perfect satisfaction with the work of atonement, and that distance between Himself and the believer had been judicially removed, and for ever.

Our altar then is founded on the precious fact that our sins have been judged, and that we have a purged conscience; for God hath said, "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." We draw near therefore in the consciousness of this, and the presence of Him there, who went into heaven itself by His own blood, is our unquestionable title to be there, so that we enter in with "boldness."

Do we enjoy this blessed way of approach to God? Have we known what it is thus to "draw near," being assured of God's welcoming us on the ground of the precious blood of His own Son? If so, what can be our employ when there but praise and thanksgiving? In the consciousness of the eternal efficacy of the blood of Jesus, how can we hesitate to take our place inside the veil as purged worshippers who have "no more conscience of sins"? Consciousness of *sin* in us—a sinful nature—we shall have; and it may be the sorrowful consciousness of having sinned as God's children, and calling us to self-judgment and confession in answer to the advocacy of Christ Jesus with the Father, before forgiveness is realized and our communion restored. But we are told that "the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of *sins*;" that is, the believer's conscience has been purged by the blood of Christ, and he is perfected for ever by that one offering, though he may yet fail, and sin, and be greatly distressed on account of it; but he can never be a sinner in his sins again under the burden, and

guilt, and condemnation which his conscience once knew. Being perfected for ever by that one offering, and having God's assurance in His own word that He will no more remember his sins and iniquities, he can happily take his place before God inside the veil as knowing forgiveness of sins, having a purged conscience, and being a purged worshipper. How rich and marvellous is this blessedness! How could a Jew, however godly, know such happy nearness to God? Is it any wonder then that it is said that "*we have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle*"? The word of the Spirit therefore to us is, "By Him therefore *let us* offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually."

But if our approach now is so near to God that we are able to come by faith where Jesus is as purged worshippers, what must be our place necessarily on earth? If we have now access with confidence where Christ is, surely no other place can suit us *on earth* but what suits Him. He certainly finds a spot on earth where He can be, and where He is; and where is that? Is it everywhere? The Lord Jesus being a divine Person, He cannot but be in every place beholding the evil and the good; but He graciously gives His own presence, and takes His place in the midst of two or three who are gathered together in His name. There may be in Christendom a loud profession of Christianity, largely organized systems to which the Saviour's name is attached to give them credit; they may bear the stamp of antiquity, boast of hereditary and successional claims, and, like the Jews, speak of some things among them having had a divine origin, be zealous also in observing ordinances, and yet be so far from subjection

to the Lord Jesus, and so indifferent as to care for the truth of God as to become a "camp," which the faithful are enjoined to leave. On earth, as in heaven, the Holy Spirit presents to us CHRIST, not men; CHRIST, not tradition, as the central Object of gathering. (Matt. xviii. 20.) As to our place on *earth*, we have, amidst all the confusion, to find out the spot where the Lord Jesus Christ is in the midst, around whom are those who "call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (2 Tim. ii. 22.)

Having found our true place at our "altar" inside the veil, it is *then* said, "Let us go forth therefore *unto Him without the camp*, bearing His reproach." Observe here the question is not one of separation from the world, right as that is, but it is to go "outside the camp" of religiousness to the Lord Jesus in this time of His rejection, and suffer the reproach that may be connected with this faithful step. It is remarkable that the inspired writer quotes the sin-offering on the day of atonement for instruction as to this; for the blood of some of their sacrifices was carried *inside the veil* to the presence of God, and put upon the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat; and afterwards the body was burned *outside the camp*; and the reference to Jesus having died without the gate of the city as the antitype makes it clear that "the camp" was in those days the religious system of the Jews who had rejected Christ. The temple was then standing, and as there was a disposition in the Hebrew Christians to go back to Judaism, the inspired writer shows them that the path of faith is *outside* it all *with Christ*, bearing His reproach. No doubt Christendom has taken the place of Judaism, by reducing the heavenly principles of the Church of God to an earthly, successional, and established religion on earth, and setting

up again an earthly order of priesthood to accredit it, and also to give it a visible and permanent footing in the world which knew not Christ. The true believer, however, may say that "*Here*" (not only as to the world, but as to any established religiousness in it) "we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come;" and knows that the Lord is coming quickly.

It is important also to perceive in this epistle that there is no exhortation to go to Christ outside the camp until believers are brought as purged worshippers inside the veil. No doubt the order is divine. We cannot learn our true place *on earth*, but by first taking possession of our true place in *the heavenlies* where the Lord Jesus is. The blood was first carried into the *holy place* before the victim was burnt *without the camp*. First, it is said, "*Let us draw near by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh;*" and after this it is said, "*Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.*" (Heb. x. 20-22; xiii. 13.) Then walk follows.

But the Israelite had frequently to offer sacrifices; and have we no sacrifices to offer? Yes, indeed we have, and that "continually," as we have before observed. But what are they? They are "spiritual sacrifices" of praise and thanksgiving, and they are temporal sacrifices to those who need. But although our approach is so very near, and our blessings heavenly and eternal, all founded on the atoning death of Christ, and all secured for us by Him who is gone into heaven itself by His own blood, and now appears before the face of God for us, we are again reminded that it is "by Him" that our sacrifices are acceptable to God—

“By Him therefore *let us* offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with *such sacrifices God is well pleased.*”

H. H. S.

SCRIPTURE NOTES.

I.

NUMBERS iv. 13.

THE covering of the brazen altar was a purple cloth, the royal colour. If we suffer, we shall reign. There is a connection between the cross and the crown upon the earth and in heaven. Thus was it with Christ, the King of the Jews, according to the superscription written on the cross; and the very throne of God was the answer to His sufferings, inasmuch as He was the burnt-offering, offered according to the power of the eternal Spirit acting in man, according to the exigency of the divine Majesty. The comparison of Psalms xix. xx. xxi. xxii. is, under this point of view, most interesting. Psalm xix. contains testimonies of the creation and the law. Psalm xx. presents Messiah suffering, but externally, so that man can take an interest in Him. Psalm xxi., Messiah exalted; and, as a consequence, vengeance striking His enemies, who had rejected Him. Psalm xxii., His sufferings, as forsaken by God Himself. This is the expression of Christ alone; whilst, in Psalms xx. xxi., the Jewish remnant were speaking of His outward sufferings. There is no vengeance in connection with those sufferings consequent on His being forsaken of God; for it was expiation. There is nothing but

blessing, which the mouth of the Saviour announces, and to which He Himself responded by praising in the midst of His saints. This blessing will extend to the ends of the earth during the millennium. J. N. D.

II.

JUDGES vi. 23, 24.

It is instructive to observe here the difference between the exercises of heart which are the result of faith, and the answer of God to the wants and difficulties which are caused by those exercises. In verse 13 we have the expression of those exercises in a soul under the weight of the same oppression as his brethren, but who feels it thus because his faith in the Lord was real. Then we have the answer which produces peace, and, with peace, worship. It is the same, when, after having suffered death, the risen Jesus reveals Himself to His disciples with the same words that God uses here, and lays down the foundation of the Church gathered together in worship. In Luke vii. we find the same experiences in the woman who was a sinner. She believed in the person of Jesus. His grace had made Him her all; but she did not yet know that one like her was pardoned and saved, and might go in peace. This assurance was the answer given to her faith.

Now this answer is what the gospel proclaims to every believer. The Holy Ghost proclaims Jesus. This produces conviction of sin. The knowledge of God in Christ, and of ourselves, casts down (for sin is there, and we are in bondage, sold under sin); but it produces conflict, perhaps anguish. Often the soul struggles against sin, and cannot gain the mastery; it cannot get beyond

a certain point (the greater number of the sermons from which it expects light go no farther); but the gospel proclaims God's own resources for bringing it out of this state. "Peace be unto thee," "thy sins are forgiven." "Thy faith" (for she has faith), Christ says to the poor sinful woman, "hath saved thee." This was what she had not yet known. J. N. D.

III.

1 KINGS xix. 1-3.

We see here how far the energy of the outward life of faith may continue to exist, while the inward life grows weak. It was at the moment of the most striking testimony to the presence of God in the midst of the rebellious people, and when Elijah had just caused all the prophets of Baal amongst them to be slain by the people's own hands, that his faith entirely fails at a mere threat from Jezebel. His life was not inwardly sustained by this faith in proportion to the outward testimony. His testimony excites the enemy in a way for which his personal faith was not prepared. This is a solemn lesson. The still small voice (which, unknown to him, was still heard among the people) had not perhaps its due influence upon his own heart, where the fire and manifestations had held too much place. Thus he did not know himself the grace which was still in exercise towards the people; he could not love them for the sake of the seven thousand faithful ones, as God loved them, nor hope as charity hopes. Alas! what are we, even when so near God! And his complaint when he came to God, for a person so blessed, has a sad deal of self in it. "I have been zealous," he says, "and

they have cast down thine altars, and killed thy prophets;" just when he had cast down Baal's altars, and killed all his prophets; and then, "I am left alone." It is a humbling testimony. J. N. D.

IV.

2 KINGS viii. 4-6.

It seems to me that Gehazi stands here in a grievous position. Smitten by the hand of God, because his heart clung to earth, even in the presence of Jehovah's mighty and long-suffering testimony, he is now a parasite in the king's court, relating the wonderful things in which he no longer took part. This poor world grows weary enough of itself to lead it to take some pleasure in hearing anything spoken of that has reality and power. Provided that it does not reach the conscience, they will listen to it for their amusement, taking credit to themselves perhaps for an enlarged and a liberal mind, which is not enslaved by that which they can yet recognize philosophically in its place. But that is a sad position, which makes it evident that formerly we were connected with a testimony, whilst now we only relate its marvels at court. Nevertheless God makes use of it; and it does not follow that there was no truth in Gehazi. But to rise in the world, and entertain the world with the mighty works of God, is to fall very deeply. J. N. D.

THE Christian is freed, not because his sins are for ever pardoned, but because he is dead to sin, crucified with Christ.

THE BOOK OF EZRA.

CHAPTER viii.

THE close connection between this and the preceding chapter will be at once perceived. Chapter vii. closed with the words, "And I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me;" this commences with, "These are now the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king." This genealogy reaches to the end of verse 14, and it shows how precious to God were the very names of those who responded to His call at such a moment. The response itself is the fruit of His grace; but in the exercise of that same grace He is pleased to impute to His people that which He Himself had produced in their hearts. It was a goodly company, numbering over fifteen hundred souls, who were thus gathered to return to the land of their fathers—the land of all their traditions, as well as the land of all their hopes.

The first act of Ezra was to assemble them by "the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi." (v. 15.) There were two, but only two, priests; viz., Gershom, son of Phinehas, and Daniel, son of Ithamar; but of the Levitical family, outside the priesthood, there was absolutely not one. Well might Ezra have been concerned, for it was a sad symptom of the state into which the people had fallen. The priests alone enjoyed access to the holy place of the house of their God, and

the Levites alone were the appointed ministers in all that appertained to its service; and yet when the proclamation was made that they might return and once more resume their privileges, they were untouched and indifferent. They had found a home in the very place where their fathers had hung their harps on the willows, and wept when they remembered Zion. And it is the same with God's people now. The moment they are tempted by the enemy to "mind earthly things," they become careless of their spiritual privileges, and, if not aroused from their lethargy, may even become "enemies of the cross of Christ." No child of God who understands his heavenly calling could be content to dwell in Babylon.

Nor was Ezra content to leave the Levites behind. Besides, he knew the needs of the Lord's house, and it pained this devoted servant to find them caring for their own things rather than for the courts of Jehovah. He accordingly took measures to reach their consciences, that they might even yet join him in his mission to Jerusalem. To this end he sent for some of their chief men, among whom were Joiarib and Elnathan, "men of understanding." It is well for the people of God when, in times of decay and corruption, there are still men of understanding to be found. It is by these that God preserves His saints from sinking into still deeper depths, and keeps alive what of faith and hope may still remain. Ezra knew where to put his hand on some of these; and his zeal for the work on which his heart was set is expressed in the commission with which he entrusted them. He says, "And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his

brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God." (*v.* 17.) It is said of the Lord Jesus, or rather, speaking in spirit, He Himself said, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (Psalm lxix. 9; John ii. 17); and this was because the glory of the Father was ever His supreme object. God's name, God's honour, were ever the delight of His soul. And Ezra also, in his measure, desired Jehovah's honour in His house, and was therefore in fellowship with the heart of God Himself. This was the secret of his earnestness in seeking to obtain "ministers for the house of our God."

And God wrought with him, as he himself confesses; for he says, "By the good hand of our God upon us, they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah, of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty; also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name." (*vv.* 18-20.) There were still less than forty Levites, while there were two hundred and twenty Nethinims.* It is another proof that, amid the carnal ease of Babylon, the national hopes and privileges of the nation had ceased to exert any practical power upon their minds. By the side of the sloth of the Levites, it is beautiful to notice the number of the Nethinims (probably of an alien race) that obeyed the summons of Ezra. It may be in reference to this that it is said, "all of them were

* For an explanation of these, see on chap. ii.

expressed by name." God notices their faithfulness, and caused it to be recorded.

All was now ready, as far as collecting the people was concerned; but both Ezra as well as the people needed preparation for the journey which they had undertaken. Hence he says, "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him. So we fasted and besought our God for this; and He was entreated of us." (*vv.* 21-23.)

The work of God is never lightly to be entered upon; and it was with a true discernment both of the character of the work, and of what was due to His glory who had called him to it that Ezra proclaimed this fast, that he and the people might afflict themselves before their God. The flesh cannot be used, in any shape and form, in the Lord's service; and it is only when in true separation from all that it might feed upon, and in humiliation in the presence of God, that our motives, aims, and objects, are tested and become apparent. Thus amongst those that had gathered around Ezra, some might have been attracted by other things than the welfare of the house of their God. This is always the case in any action of the Holy Spirit. Ezra, therefore, would have all searched by the light of God's holy presence, that they might learn that nothing would avail to protect, and guide them in their journey, and nothing

could sustain them by the way or in their after service, but the good hand of their God. Thus it was that he and they together fasted, afflicted their souls, and prayed.

And the question may well arise whether in this day our service for God is not often too easily taken up; whether it would not conduce to spiritual power and efficacy if, before we embarked upon anything for God, we were more frequently found in this attitude of Ezra and his companions. Far be it from us to insinuate for one moment that the Lord's servants do not thus seek His face before commencing their service. Our question concerns rather collective waiting upon God with fasting before work is entered upon in which the saints at large have a common interest. It was understood in the early Church; for we read, "There were in the Church that was at Antioch prophets. . . . As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me now* Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." (Acts xiii. 1, 2.) If there were but a revival of such a practice in the power of the Holy Ghost (for to imitate it without the power would be worse than useless), far larger results from service in teaching and ministry might be confidently anticipated.

Another reason for this gathering actuated Ezra: He was a man of faith, and he had avowed before the king his confidence in God for protection during his journey, and he would not therefore ask for a military escort. And now, in consistency with his profession, he, together with the people, cast himself on God for guidance, for

* This word "now," or some such, should be inserted as a translation of the Greek particle $\delta\eta$, and as showing the connection between the ministering and fasting, and the command of the Holy Spirit; in fact, the Holy Spirit responded to the prayers of these prophets.

a "right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance." As every believer knows, it is one thing to express trust in God before a difficulty comes, and another thing to maintain that dependence in the presence of, and when passing through, the difficulty. Ezra was able to do both, and was able to rest in the assurance that the hand of his God would be upon all them that seek Him for good, and that His power and His wrath would be against all them that forsake Him. All this he doubtless told out before the Lord during this fast, and indeed he had pledged the faithfulness of God before a Gentile monarch, so that the name and honour of Jehovah were concerned in appearing for His servant. Ezra tells us, "So we fasted and besought our God for this; and He was entreated of us." Yea, God delights to respond to the confidence of His people, and to appear for those who testify to what He is for them amid trials and dangers. And the reader should remark, that it was no imaginary danger which Ezra had conjured up; for he records afterward to the praise of his God that "He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way." (v. 31.) Surely God is the refuge and strength of His people, and a very present help for them in trouble, and they would know it more fully if, like Ezra, they did but learn to count upon Him as all-sufficient in all possible circumstances. When Nehemiah made the same journey some years after, he was accompanied by captains of the army and horsemen. (Neh. ii. 9.) In him faith was not in such lively exercise, though he had a true heart for the Lord's interests. How much better to trust in the Lord than in a visible arm! and they that wait on Him will, like Ezra, never be ashamed.

In the next place Ezra "separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren," to take charge of the offerings he had received for the house of their God until they should arrive at Jerusalem. (*vv.* 24-30.) The ground of his choice was, that they were "holy unto the Lord," as also were the vessels. (*v.* 28.) As the prophet said, "Ye must be clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." And this we know was according to the divine order; for none but the priests and Levites could touch or carry the holy vessels or furniture of the house of God. (See Num. iv.) Out of a blind misconception of this, and of the nature of Christianity, has grown the ecclesiastical custom of setting apart an order of men, the clergy, for ministration in the Church. It is quite true that those who minister in any way from the Lord to His people must needs be set apart for their service; but this must be accomplished, not by the hands of men, but by the sovereign action in grace of God through the power of the Holy Ghost. Under law there was a distinct class of men—the priests and the Levites—but these were divinely appointed and divinely consecrated; but under grace, while there are still distinctions of gifts and services (1 Cor. xii.), all believers alike are priests, and as such have an indefeasible title to appear in the holiest in the immediate presence of God.

It was then to the custody of the priests that Ezra committed the holy vessels, and the silver and the gold, which had been given as a free-will offering unto the Lord God of their fathers. And he enjoined them to watch and keep these things "until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem,

in the chambers of the house of the Lord." (v. 29.) The expression "weigh them" contains a principle of importance. It was not that Ezra doubted the fidelity of the priests he had selected; but even as the apostle of a later age, he would "provide for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." (2 Cor. viii. 21.) The people might have had full confidence in the integrity both of Ezra and of the priests; but Ezra would remove all occasion for the enemy's work by having the vessels, and the silver and the gold, weighed when put into the priest's hands, and again weighed when delivered. He thus proved his and their fidelity. And surely this is a godly, a scriptural example to be followed by those who in any way have charge of the offerings of the Lord's people. Such should be careful to render an account of their stewardship, and not wait to be pressed to give it. Many a difficulty in the Church of God might have been obviated if this practice had been adopted. It may further be noted that on reaching Jerusalem the weighing was done by others than Ezra, "and all the weight was written at that time." (vv. 33, 34.) In modern language, the accounts of Ezra were checked and audited; and this was done on the fourth day after the completion of their journey.

In verse 31 we have a short statement (already alluded to) concerning their journey. It simply records the faithfulness of their God in answer to their prayers. "Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. And we came to Jerusalem." In

chap. vii. 9, it is said that they began to go up upon the first day of the first month, this being the probable date of gathering the people to the river Ahava. (Chap. viii. 15.) The actual journey occupied therefore a little less than four months; and Ezra testifies that God safely guided them through all its perils and dangers, and shielded them from all their foes. Truly the name of the Lord is a strong tower, and the righteous run into it and are safe.

Nor were they unmindful of the Lord after the difficulties of their journey were over; for "the children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he goats for a sin-offering: all this was a burnt-offering unto the Lord." It is touching in the extreme to see this feeble remnant, as also was the case at the dedication of the house of God (chap. vi. 17), embrace in their faith the whole of Israel. They were but few in number, but they could accept no narrower ground than that of the twelve tribes, and to this they testified by the number of their offerings. It is the same now, or should be so, with those who are gathered out to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ on the ground of the one body. They also may be few, feeble, and poor; but if they have any intelligence of the wealthy place into which they have been brought, they will refuse any narrower ground than that of all the members of the one body; and if they hold this truth in power, their sacrifices of praise will bear witness to it in the presence of all. Failing to do so, they degenerate, whatever their profession, into the narrowest sectarianism, than which nothing is

more abhorrent to the mind of the Lord. Others may taunt them with their poverty and broken condition; but if they do but, "with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love," endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, maintaining before God the sense of oneness with all the saints, the Lord will abundantly sustain them with His approbation and blessing.

It will be noticed that there were two kinds of sacrifices—burnt-offerings and sin-offerings. From the numbers, it would seem that the twelve he goats, as well as the twelve bullocks, were for all Israel, and that the other offerings were individual, the spontaneous expression of grateful hearts for the mercy of Jehovah towards them, in bringing them in safety to Jerusalem and to His house.

Having thus put themselves under the efficacy of the sacrifices, and having established their relationships with God on the only possible ground, they proceeded to deliver "the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river: and they furthered the people, and the house of God." (v. 36.) This order is as instructive as beautiful. They first placed themselves under the favour of God, through their offerings, and then they turned to the king's officers. They gave their God their first thoughts and the first place, and they owned thereby that all depended on Him. He answered to His people's confidence by touching the hearts of the lieutenants and governors, and inclining them to favour His people and the object they had in view. How blessed it is to be wholly dependent on God, and to look to Him alone to further His cause!

E. D.

"REST AT NOON."

SONG OF SOLOMON i. 7.

THIS song, though primarily applying to the earthly bride, Jerusalem hereafter, guides us now as to the Church, the heavenly bride, who is now on earth, and to those affections proper to her; and hence it is suited to each of us individually.

And this verse in the song speaks so plainly for itself that little need be said. It ought to be the heart's language of every Christian. "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest." The heart desires to know the place where Christ finds that which satisfies Him—where He feeds. Where does He find this, if not in the company of the saints to-day? On earth He said He had "meat to eat which ye know not of." In the Psalms again we read of Him speaking as a man on earth: "My goodness extendeth not to thee [to the saints, the excellent of the earth]. In them is all my delight." And again, in Prov. viii, "My delights were with the sons of men."

Is your heart then occupied with what we have here—the desire to know where the Lord finds His delight *now*? It is in the company of His people. (Matt. xviii. 20.) But surely, if so, He desires also to find His food, His refreshment, in us individually; and one asks the question, to be answered by each of our hearts, "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest." Can I, can you, be content that He finds no refreshment in *our* company? Are we content to get

through a single day, or hour, apart from communion with Him—giving Him in us no refreshment?

Secondly, the verse goes on, "Tell me where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon." The heart desires to know this also; for if the Lord finds His portion in us (the Lord's portion is His people), He will give us also to *rest* in Him. The love of the bride and Bridegroom, though differing, is a reciprocal love. "We love Him because He first loved us." He gets nothing from us to satisfy Him; but He gives ten thousandfold more to us, to satisfy *us*. Noon is the time of the day when the sun is highest. And to us, when the trial is bitterest, the way all hedged in, the desert a trackless waste of sand, without a shadow in it to shelter us, HE causes "His flock to rest at noon." As we read also in chap. ii.: "I sat down under His shadow with great delight." And when do you want a shadow? It is when the sun is high in the sky. Is Jesus then this to you? Have you found in Him, not merely your Saviour, but your *rest* (the rest to your souls of Matt. xi.). No rest can the flock find but with Him, in His company. But we want to know more of this for ourselves as individual Christians, one plodding on under one difficulty, and another under another, but Jesus—the One to whom each of us can come and say, "Thou whom my soul loveth"—Jesus, enough for ALL the difficulties I find in my daily path, and more than enough—REST for me in them all.

And if He give me "rest at noon," if I find the place where He maketh His flock to rest when the sun *is highest*, what about His care of the flock, and of me, during the other hours of the day? for the day is all the time the sun shines. If I am thus with Him, and

prove Him in that part of my little day when I *wanted Him most*, what a path is that of a Christian! Here on earth I am learning that Christ desires *always* to be in my company, and to have me consciously in all the rest of what the knowledge of His presence and company with me can and do bring. Again I would ask myself, and I would ask you, Have we found this place in the midst of the desert of this world? A desert indeed; but the heart which has known Jesus in all its cares thus can say, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul, He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." *Can you say this? The Lord guide your heart into it more and more.*

H. C. A.

If failure comes in, you must not give up all for lost, but thank God that you have a connection with Christ in God, which your failure cannot touch. Satan cannot check the living water that flows forth to me in spite of all I am in myself, enabling me to be "*up and on.*"

In the death of a believer, I only see the expression of the love of Christ opening the way to a place where the soul can be present with Himself.

OUGHT we not to be able to say of a believer, that the way he lives to God, delights the heart of Christ; and that the way he lives to Christ delights the heart of God?

G. V. W.

THE BROKEN SABBATH.

JOHN V.

SOME solemn thoughts arise in reading this chapter, though the questions and answers it awakes bring out blessed subjects for the soul's meditation; for since sin entered into the world, its sorrowful effects have ever been the occasion for the manifestation of divine grace, and the discovery that the blessed God is above all the power of evil and the evil one.

Without at all intending to dwell on the detail of the chapter before us, I would notice two things which stand out with prominence; viz., the miracle wrought, and the sabbath apparently broken—two things that a pious Jew would find it difficult to reconcile. The smallest reflection would assure him, that the power and goodness displayed in the miracle was none other than that of God, the Jehovah-Rophi of Israel, who had come down into the midst of the sorrows of His people in the Person of the despised Jesus of Nazareth; but that this work of power should be wrought on the sabbath-day, and the ordinance of the Lord be seemingly broken, would be his perplexity. He knew that of nothing was the Lord more jealous than that His sabbath should be kept inviolate. It was one of the most intimate links between the Lord and His people Israel; but now this same Lord is in their midst, giving the most convincing testimony of who He was, yet according to their thoughts disregarding the sacred sabbath, and when charged with it justifying Himself with the well-

known words, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

This was quite inexplicable to a conscientious Jew, but still more intolerable to the religious fanatic, in whose eyes the keeping of the sabbath was of far greater moment than the relief of human suffering and woe. But, dear reader, this difficulty only brings out, as do all other difficulties which sin has occasioned, the manifold wisdom and goodness of that God whom we know as our Father.

The very meaning of sabbath is rest, and rest implies satisfaction, as we see in its first mention in Gen. ii. God had created the heavens and the earth, had perfected all in order and beauty according to His own mind; at the close of each successive day's toil He had pronounced it very good; and when all was finished, and He could look out on all with pleasure and approval, He rested from His labour, and sanctified the day that thus expressed this satisfaction in the works of His hand. But let us for a moment reflect on the scene of our chapter. Alas! how changed, a change baffling description! Everything is in disorder; the beauty of all is tarnished and spoilt; man, the lord and head of the first creation, himself a total wreck, lying a helpless cripple at the pool-side. What a sight to meet the eye of the Son of God! Could He rest in such a scene, and amidst such surroundings? Could the sorrow and misery which met His eye yield any satisfaction to Him? How far from it! Too keenly did He feel human woe, too deeply in His bosom were the interests and well-being of poor man to allow Him to pass through all with unfeeling indifference; nay, the suffering of man and the tender sensibilities of His

nature made it utterly impossible for Him to keep any sabbath here. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," tell us this.

Ever since sin entered the world the God of all grace has laboured, and will continue His labour until sin and all its bitter fruits are for ever banished out of His realm; then will He keep His long and unbroken sabbath of eternity—"He will rest in His love; He will joy over thee with singing;" but this could not be in the day of our chapter. Love cannot but be active so long as there is a need or sorrow to call it forth; and so it was as Jesus passed through those dismal porches of Bethesda. No Jewish ritual or Jewish hatred could check the activity of His love; with a dignity above it all He moved. He had come to do His Father's will, to reveal the Father's love, and He finds in the misery before Him a suited occasion for its display. Nothing can exceed its beauty. He singles out the most pitiable case—one who was "without strength," and had "no man" to help him. How like a Saviour to select this case out of all others to display His power and goodness. "Wilt thou be made whole?" says Jesus. What a strange question to ask! We should have thought the question of willingness lay all on the other side; but so it is, however it may surpass our thoughts. Jesus is more willing to save than sinners are to be saved. He came to save; His very mission from the glory was to bring down the grace and power of God to relieve poor man from the misery under which he lay, and so here He seeks one who is willing for Him to exercise His mission upon.

Amazed that such a question should be asked him,

the man replies, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool." Although this divine visitation was brought so near him, he had not enough strength to avail himself of it, nor one who was sufficiently above his state to assist him; but, blessed be God, there now stood by his side One who could not be numbered among the fallen race—Son of man, it is true, but also Son of God. In grace He had come down to "destroy the works of the devil," and deliver poor man from his grasp. No sooner is there the confession of his helplessness and an implied willingness than the word is spoken, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk."

This is a lovely picture of what grace would do eternally after the mighty work of redemption was accomplished, a work in which not only the guilt of sin, but the whole state of man as a sinner, should be dealt with. Jesus "died for our sins according to the Scriptures;" but more, "He was made sin for us." He takes upon Himself the whole condemnation under which we lay as children of fallen Adam, and now "grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life." Not only are we thus justified from all things, but quickened out of our death in trespasses and sins, raised up in that life in which Jesus was raised, and have our place in Him now in the heavenlies according to Eph. ii. Unspeakable blessing! Unspeakable grace, that has bestowed it on such as we! And if we are left on earth for a time, as we are, it is that we should be to the praise of Him who has blessed us, just as the once impotent man was as a testimony to the power and grace of the One who had healed him. It is this testimony that evoked the hatred of the

Jews, because it seemed to set aside what gave importance to themselves, and it is still true that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." May the Lord Himself give each of us grace in our varied circumstances and callings to be witnesses of His grace and power, not only by our words, but by our walk homewards, taking a lesson from the example before us of being able to justify all we do by the beautiful word, "He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk." H. A. C.

I CAN be before God just as I am: take care not to pass that by. It is a wondrous part of the glory of Christ that a person with sin in him can be in the presence of God in perfect favour. *Sin* could not be *there*, but it was all borne by Him who was the accepted sacrifice in His own body on the cross, and put away for ever. By faith in Him I am brought into the light with nothing to hide—and I do not want to hide anything. There is sin and mortality about me, but all that I am cannot separate me from Christ. God says, "He is the accepted sacrifice, and I have nothing to say against you as to all you are in yourself; in Him you are perfectly accepted, the blood cleanseth from all sin." But I have need to be in the light to keep up a walk that becomes such a place. If I turn aside, I shall forget that I am purged from my old sins, and God must come in with a rod. You must keep your walk up by having your eye fixed on Christ. G. V. W.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD AND THE THEORIES
OF THE MIND.

THERE is a very common but a very great and subtle evil found among us, and it may exist in those of whose Christianity there is not the least doubt, and whose whole faith and hope are in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is this, the human mind in those who have gone on long in the ways of the Lord, as well as in the one who has only lately been converted, is quite capable of boldly entering upon, and of even seeking to expound, divine things. It is written, "The flesh profiteth nothing." It is the Spirit of God alone that can teach; for I am as a Christian brought into that new sphere where He is all. "They that worship the Father must worship Him in spirit and in truth." The display of anything else is the display of the mind of man; for the Spirit cannot, and does not, go beyond what is written. I must remember two things if I desire to be led on into further truth. One is, that there must be seen in me the present faithfulness according to the truth that God has already unfolded to me. Without this there can be nothing further communicated to me, nor any advance. If I assume to see something beyond others when I am unfaithful to what is already their known portion as well as my own, it is only a delusion of the flesh seeking by these, or by any means, to exalt itself.

How often the mind (even in those who desire to curb it) is found to wander off and form *theories* as to the things of God. The Word is then turned to find

scriptural support for these things which, proceeding from the old man, should have been at once rejected.

The second thing, if I desire to advance in the truth, is one which I must carefully guard. It is that no power of my mind, no amount of reasoning, can instruct me in the most simple of divine things. These the Holy Spirit alone can explain and teach me, if there is in me the first thing found; namely, that I am acting in faithfulness on all that He has *already* brought before me.

How can I discern what is of the mind merely, and what is of the Spirit? The working of the human mind in me as a Christian is seen when I get hold of *any* theory, and then turn to the word of God to try to establish myself in it. It is the reverse way exactly to this when God is teaching me. Then the *Word* comes first, not the theory. The theory may be presented in a very subtle manner to me (indeed this is generally the case). It is called a "beautiful thought," for example, by some unestablished one, and we forget its *origin*. All this is to blind us, as well as to puff us up. Then the fruit comes. Blinded ourselves, we set to work to teach and enlighten others upon the subject, and thence we trace all the sects and systems of men. Here they all originated. I must come to the word of God to *learn* what is there, not to add anything by some greater clearness of vision which *I* have than those had who were used of God to write it. That holy men of God have spoken and written the Word, and used better words than human, even words which "the Holy Ghost teacheth," ought to rebuke the vain assumption that theories or words of mine can have place here. The Spirit is leading me, I judge, when in simplicity and dependence I read and meditate on the word of God, and see what is

unfolded to me therein, and thus I am led forward; but the *Word* comes first, not the theory. When this is so I have not to frame a theory. All who are in subjection to the Word (and to the Spirit, the teacher) are satisfied with *it*, and the theory is unnecessary. If the word of God is not enough, the "theory" forms a sect.

H. C. A.

SCRIPTURE NOTES.

I. THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM.

MARK I. 14.

THE preaching of Jesus announced the kingdom, showed that the time was fulfilled, that the kingdom of God was at hand, that the people must repent and believe the gospel. We should distinguish between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of our salvation. Christ is the centre of both; but there is a great difference between the preaching of a kingdom which is drawing near, and that of an eternal redemption accomplished upon the cross. It is quite possible that the two truths should be announced together. And indeed we find that the apostle Paul preached the kingdom; but he certainly also proclaimed an eternal redemption accomplished for us on the cross. Christ prophesied of His death, and announced that the Son of man should give His life for the ransom of many; but He could not announce an accomplished redemption during His life. Men ought to have received Him, and not to have put Him to death. Hence His testimony was about the kingdom which was drawing nigh.

This kingdom in its public power has been delayed because Christ has been rejected (see Rev. xi. 17); and

this delay lasts all the time that Christ is sitting at the right hand of God until the time when He shall arise from the throne of His Father to judge. God has said, "Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." (Ps. cx. 1.) It is nevertheless true that the kingdom was already come in mystery according to Matt. xiii. This goes on during the time that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God; but when God's appointed moment shall come the Lord will arise and set up the kingdom, and with His own power will judge the living, and peace and happiness shall be established on the earth; and we who have received Him, whilst the world has rejected Him, shall go to meet Him in the air. We shall be for ever with the Lord, and shall come with Him in glory when He shall appear before the world, and shall reign with Him; and, what is still far better, we shall be like Him, and always with Him in the Father's house.

J. N. D.

II. THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF CHRIST.

2 Cor. iv. 4.

As to the difference between the gospel of the glory and the gospel of the humiliation, the latter is pure grace in God, manifested here in Christ. John's writings show God revealing Himself in Christ to man in His life down here. In Paul's writings what we have habitually is man manifested in righteousness before God. The gospel of humiliation is perfect grace; it is God coming down to man where he is, visiting him in his condition as such a one on earth. The gospel of the glory takes "this treasure" (v. 7) and unfolds it. In Philippians ii. we have the whole line, from the time when Christ was in "the form of God"

till He was on the cross, when, being found in fashion as a Man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death. This is the manifestation of God down here amongst sinners. . . . But in the gospel of the glory man is looked at as the old man totally set aside, yet man is in glory in virtue of the complete work that redeems us and justifies us, and gives us a place in the glory. The glory is the testimony to the efficacy of the work; the humiliation is the testimony to the greatness of the love. But it is all the same gospel. . . . The gospel of the humiliation is God in grace, whereas the gospel of the glory is Man in glory, of course as fruit of grace. In the gospel of the humiliation we have God in Christ, and in the gospel of glory we have man in Christ. The latter is a glorious result of the other no doubt, but it is a different aspect of the gospel.

J. N. D.

"LIKE A SHEPHERD."

ISAIAH xl. 11.

How tender all His care,
None like His weak ones know!
How His strong arm can safely bear,
And suited strength bestow!

He found me faint and low,
He raised my drooping head;
Poured healing oil in every wound,
My hungry soul He fed.

And now His love doth keep
A poor and feeble child,
And on His bosom I repose
Throughout the desert wild.

From place to place He leads,
By His own faithful cloud ;
And trustingly I follow Him,
Though darkness may enshroud.

He knows the way to take,
Close in His steps I tread ;
And as I hear the Shepherd's voice,
No threatening danger dread.

But on His love recline,
Who gave Himself for me,
Till in His glory bright I shine
With Him eternally.

E'en suffering now is sweet,
If His deep grace I prove ;
And in new sorrows drink new springs
Of everlasting love.

My weakness too is blest,
As on His strength I lean ;
And every step is one of praise,
Though in a desert scene.

My tent is often struck,
And many changes come ;
But soon the journey will be o'er,
And then—my heavenly home.

My title—Jesus' blood,
My Guide—His loving hand ;
And then farewell to desert scenes,
I've reached my Fatherland.

H. A. C.