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"THIS PEOPLE =

HAVE I FORMED FOR

MYSELF." = =

By T. H. R.

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"THIS PEOPLE HAVE I FORMED FOR MYSELF."

(Isa. xLIII. 21.)

THE above words were spoken of Israel, and in connection with such a subject the Spirit caused Isaiah to write some very wonderful and blessed expressions. "I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." Again, "Thou wast precious in my sight I have loved thee." But what I desire to present to my readers is the way in which the Lord now forms a people for Himself. I do not think that any people before or after have been or

will be brought into the same intimacy of love as we have been, that is to say, the saints who have been drawn by the Father to Christ from the moment of His rejection until His coming. No other company eat the Lord's supper—there may be analogy in Israel feeding on the passover lamb—but that is not what we have, the fellowship of His death. There was a speciality of love in the Lord gathering His own together on the night of His betrayal and giving them the bread and the cup. Israel (as Israel) never knew such a moment, and that moment is continued to us; never had there been nor could there be such an expression of love and interest. It was a night much to be remembered by Israel, that night when they first fed on the passover lamb; but we come together to the remembrance of Himself. The act of His death, of His giving Himself, is past and over, but what was in that act, the love to His own, abides-Himself abides. All the virtue of that act is ours. Ah! but Himself, the living One out of death, is known by us in the breaking of bread. We sit together in the fellowship of His death while He is rejected here, and none ever had such a place as we, the saints of this present period, now have. How deeply affection to Him and to one another is formed in the sense of this place of love.

Now John vi. 53, &c., is not the Lord's supper, but the appropriation of the death of Christ each one for himself. In the sense of the love of Christ we are nourished in divine affections at the Lord's supper, I doubt not, but in this chapter we have the appropriation by those drawn to Christ of Himself in death; that is where, so to speak, His love really touches us, where it is efficacious in its application; but then it carries us to the realisation of a place where there is nothing but Himself filling it; I do not mean heaven, but a place morally apprehended which He fills.

Let us look at the setting of this subject. The Lord takes in verses

5-11 the place of Messiah according to Psalm exxxii. 15. He abundantly blesses her provision, and satisfies her poor with bread. The people then want to make Him a king, but He could not reign over the world as it is, and He leaves it and goes on high. The disciples cross the stormy waters; the Lord rejoins them in the midst of their trouble, and immediately they are at the land whither they went. Four things come thus into view: (1) Desolation here, because He who could abundantly bless is gone on high; (2) His absence here, but presence there; (3) the opposition of spiritual wickedness, in winds and waves; and (4) the return of the Lord, which brings the remnant to the land whither they went, not to heaven, certainly, but to the millennium.

Now manifestly the moment in which the Lord's people are at the present time is characterised by His absence here, and His presence as their Priest in heaven. Hence His people have desolation here, and spiritual opposition. Those are the circumstances, but they have the love of Christ. (See Rom. viii. 35-39.) This love comes out in a peculiar way consequent on the fact of His rejection by Israel, His earthly people. The multitude only sought Him for the goodness expressed to them in the things of this life. The Jews murmured, for them He was only

"Jesus the son of Joseph." Living bread out of heaven they neither perceived nor cared for. Could they have attached the grace of Christ to the life of this world, all well, but they were not prepared to recognise in Jesus, the lowly Son of man, the Son of God. What then was the comfort of the Lord, who had come down to sojourn in a world of want and woe and death -the bread of God out of heaven? His comfort was found in the Father drawing souls to Him, nor would He cast out one that came. Do let us note the peculiar moment, and the peculiar circumstances, and this drawing of souls by the Father to Him, when men had no desire for Him. How specially His own

must those so drawn become. Gentile as well as Jew, for every one that perceives the Son and believes on Him has eternal life, and the Lord adds, "I will raise him up at the last day." There is to my mind a speciality of interest and love in that word, "I will raise him up," four times repeated; as in chapter xiv., the blessed Lord says, "I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." In chapter v. the Lord had spoken of the hour when all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God: His glory is thus secured, but His love and peculiar interest are told out in the words, "I will raise him up at the last day."

Again, the Lord speaks in verse 51, "If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever," and so the Gentile gets his place in this special company who are thus nourished on Christ Himself. Drawn to Him by the Father, they appropriate His death; their past history of sin and shame is ended in that death. such is His love, and a new history opens to them in which they realise the love that gave Himself in death for them. They now live by Him, but the way of it is ever in appropriating Himself, as the sustenance and nourishment of their souls. It is true they are where Christ was rejected, and hence in scenes where they know desolation, and the opposition of the spiritual powers of wickedness. The circumstances are not altered, but He has been in them, and knows them all, but now has through death opened up to us a sphere of holy love which is outside of death. It is not heaven. that is future, but it is what is heavenly come down that we might find it the sustenance of a life we have in Him. Hence, whatever the desolation or the opposition here, before the moment of Christ's return to the remnant of Israel, He has the comfort of a people peculiarly His own, who are nourished in His own love in giving Himself in death, and whom He thus forms for Himself. And they, in the scene of desolation and opposition, are sustained by feeding on the love which has gone down to the lowest point for them. They accept the place of His death, counting on His love to raise them up at the last day.

We can well understand what a depth there was of longing love in the Lord's words to His disciples: "Will ye also go away?" and how that love was answered, through the Father's drawing, by the response of Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that thou art the holy one of God." Thus was a company formed for Himself. And on our part, there can be no circumstance in which we may find ourselves here, wherein we cannot have the

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sustainment and support of Himself in it, while He thus forms us for Himself, and secures our affections, and leads us into the sphere of eternal life, beyond all the death that is here.

T. H. R.

