

The Breaches in the Wall

Isaiah 22: 5-14.

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This passage depicts a dark day in the history of Jerusalem. It was "a day of trouble" and "perplexity." The walls of the city were broken down and the enemy was "at the gate." The inhabitants of Jerusalem saw their choice valleys filled with chariots, and the horsemen of their enemy at the gate. To defend themselves they looked "to the armour of the house of the forest." They saw also "the breaches of the city of David," and made the most desperate efforts to stop the breaches, even breaking down the houses to fortify the walls.

Alas, in the day of their trouble, they missed the mind of the Lord, and this in a threefold way.

First, they entirely failed to see that the "trouble" and "perplexity" — the enemy at the gate and the breaches in the wall — were "by" or "from the Lord God of Hosts." They overlooked the first great cause of all their trouble and, looking merely at second causes, could only see that an enemy had made the breaches. They did not see that the Lord was behind all, and that, in His righteous judgment He had allowed the enemies of Israel to make the breaches in the wall because of their sin and folly.

Secondly, though they made the most strenuous efforts to repair the breaches, yet, in their trouble and perplexity, they did not look to the Lord. The Lord has to say, "Thou didst look in that day to the armour" . . . "but ye have not looked unto the Maker thereof, neither had respect unto Him, that fashioned it long ago."

Thirdly, the Lord called "to weeping and to mourning," and instead they abandoned themselves to feasting and drinking, for they said, "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." They pursued their course, as if all would be well, with utter indifference as to results and without a thought as to the future.

In this, the close of the Christian dispensation, the people of God again find themselves in "a day of trouble" and "perplexity," according to that word which tells us "in the last days difficult times shall come." We may truly say the enemy is at the gate ever seeking to break up and scatter the people of God, and our hands are weakened for resisting the enemy by reason of the breaches in the wall. Hence the words of the prophet still carry with them warning, as well as guidance, for those who are in a like condition, and who have ears to hear, for "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we through endurance and encouragement of the scriptures might have hope."

Before, however, we seek to apply the lessons of Isaiah 22, it may be well to take a general view of the condition in which the people of God find themselves today, and the distinct activities of the Spirit of God during the past four centuries. In this period there have been, we judge,

THREE GREAT MOVEMENTS of the SPIRIT of GOD.

First, no true believer can ever cease to thank God for that mighty work of the Spirit in the early part of the sixteenth century by which we have gained an open Bible in a language to be understood, and the general knowledge of gospel truths by which the soul is saved and established in its individual relationships with God. The peace and religious liberty we enjoy today, we owe, under the good hand of God, to that noble band of reformers who in the face of deadly opposition, proclaimed the truths which in many cases cost them suffering, persecution, and a martyr's death.

We must not, however, make the Reformation the measure of divine truth. The movement, in the hands of men, essentially took a reforming character. It left believers associated together in reformed churches, but it in nowise attempted to gather believers after the pattern of the primitive Church. Indeed the question of the true nature and character of the Church was never directly raised by the Reformers. The Church was not in any true sense separated from the world; on the contrary, the reformation placed the Church, in general, under subjection to the State in order to free it from subjection to the Pope. The movement did not give Christ His place, in heaven, as the Head of the Church which is His body, nor did it give the Holy Spirit His place on earth as dwelling in and with believers as the House of God. National churches were instituted and, as it has been truly said, "Churches finding their limits in the circumference of the countries inhabited by those of whom they formed part, is that which the Word of God makes not the least allusion to. Such Churches cannot either in fact or in affection be the Bride of Christ. They are necessarily in relation with the country wherein they are formed. The unity of the body of Christ is lost to them."

With the nationalisation of Churches there speedily set in the decay of vital power. The name and doctrines of Christianity were still adhered to as a creed, to which the natural man could subscribe, but only a few names left in the book of life (Rev. 3: 5). The great reformation movement has resulted in a vast number that profess Christ with comparatively few that have life in Christ. The movement which, in the power of God, commenced so brightly soon degenerated in the hands of men, into a system of orthodox profession of which the Lord has to say, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

At the dawn of the eighteenth century this lifeless profession had reached its deepest depths of darkness and decline. "Natural theology without a single distinctive doctrine of Christianity, cold morality, or barren orthodoxy, formed the staple teaching both in church and chapel. Sermons everywhere were little better than miserable moral essays utterly devoid of anything likely to awaken, convert, or save souls." But when all was at the worst there was amongst English speaking races, in the early part of the eighteenth century a second great movement of the Spirit of God, who wrought in mighty saving power. Evangelists were raised up to proclaim the glad tidings. Whitfield, Wesley, Grimshaw, Berridge and very many other earnest and devoted servants of the Lord went throughout the land warning sinners of judgment to come, arousing consciences to a sense of need, and bringing relief and salvation to thousands upon thousands through the preaching of Christ and Him crucified. We may truly thank God for this devoted band of preachers without shutting our eyes to the weakness of the movement in the hands of men. It is manifest that at its best it did not go beyond a gospel that aims to meet the need of man. It stopped short of that fuller gospel preached by the Apostle Paul that, entirely setting aside man in the flesh, links the believer with Christ in the glory, thus constituting the Christian a heavenly man. It brought blessing to the sinner, but left him in the world with the idea of making it a better and a brighter place. The result has been that worldliness, ecclesiastical and political, has become a prominent characteristic of the evangelical movement. In the sincere desire to reach the masses, every endeavour has been made to popularise the truth and make it more or less attractive to the natural mind. Every effort has been made to impress the natural man by the aid of music and other human means.

Hence the levity, and often even vulgarity, that so largely disfigures this movement in the present day. Moreover, another great weakness of the movement is its individualism. Its great aim and end is the blessing of individuals; it presents no true conception of the Church whether in its formation, its present administration or its future glory. All these essential truths of Christianity are entirely outside the scope of the Evangelical movement. Souls are truly converted, for which we may thank God, but the movement as such leaves the converted souls in the various religious systems of men.

Coming now to the early part of the nineteenth century we find a third movement of the Spirit of God. Between 1829 and 1830 a few devoted Christians in Dublin seceded from the established Church and met together, at first in a private way, to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread and for prayer and study of the Word. Very shortly, in different parts of the United Kingdom, others separated from the National Church and independent bodies, and met together in a similar way in simple faith in God without any human leadership. Taking the Scriptures as their only and sufficient authority and in dependence upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they speedily learned the great truths concerning "Christ and the Church" which had been lost to the Lord's people from the days of the apostles. They realized that Christ is the Head of the Church, and that all believers are members of one Body on earth united to the Head in heaven, and to one another, by the Holy Spirit. Having thus discovered the great central truth of the dispensation, at once every other truth received a fuller and deeper meaning. The gospel was seen and preached in its fulness. The prophetic Scriptures were opened up more fully and the coming of the Lord was seen to be the immediate hope of the Church. In connection with the revival of these truths there was a corresponding life of "good works" and separation from every form of worldliness.

It is, however, of the first importance to see the distinctive character of this movement. It was essentially a separative movement. Hitherto the true people of God had been held captive in the great religious systems of men whether Papal, National, or Nonconformist. Though converted they remained in these religious systems. Now, for the first time, large numbers were set free from the bondage of these man-made systems. The reason of this separating action of the Spirit of God is clear. The moment had at last come when God, in His mercy, was about to revive the truth concerning Christ and His Church. Anyone instructed, according to Scripture, will at once see that it was impossible to remain in connection with the systems of men, and, at the same time, hold and practice the truths concerning the Church whether viewed as the body of Christ or the House of God. It was indeed as with Israel of old; when the moment came to rebuild the House of God, it became an absolute necessity to set free a remnant of Israel from the mass of the nation in captivity, and bring them back to the Land, the true ground for God's people in that day.

Moreover, as with Israel of old the adversary attacked, both by subtlety and open hostility, the little remnant that sought to build the House of the Lord, so the enemy set to work to mar the testimony of those who were once more seeking to walk according to the principles of the House of God. Alas! he has so far succeeded that this little remnant of God's people, who were once united in the truth, have by numerous divisions, been scattered and broken up into various companies. What then we may ask has been

THE CAUSE OF DIVISIONS?

We may well ask ourselves how is it that the enemy has been allowed to bring about these disastrous divisions among this little remnant of God's people? In order to understand the underlying causes of division let us remember there are two great facts on which hang all the distinguishing truths

of Christianity which were recovered by this last movement of God. First that Christ is seated as Son of Man in the glory of God: second that the Holy Spirit as a Divine Person is dwelling in and with believers on the earth. We do not forget that every blessing enjoyed by the saints in this dispensation, as well as in the past and in the future, is secured by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, but the particular blessings which belong exclusively to Christianity are secured by these two immense facts, only true in this dispensation, that there is a Man in the highest place in glory, and a Divine Person on earth. By the Holy Spirit believers on earth have been united to one another to form that mystic body of which Christ in heaven is the Head. Then, as we have already seen, these truths, and all that they involve, can only be known in power by those who have taken a place in separation from the great religious systems of men which, by their constitution, their teaching and their practice, are a denial of the truth of the Church as unfolded in Scripture. In the light of these truths we judge the root causes of all divisions will be found to lie in three solemn facts: —

1st. We have failed to walk in the Spirit.

2nd. We have not held the Head.

3rd. We have not maintained that holy separation without which it is impossible to act in accordance with these truths.

This, however, calls for further explanation. The movement of the last century to which we have referred was essentially a spiritual movement. The return, in any measure, to the principles and practice of the great truths of the Assembly, as unfolded in the epistles, was a return to ground on which there was no room for the activity and devices of religious flesh. It was ground which, being divine, could only be taken and maintained in the power of the Spirit. We cannot read the early chapters of the Acts without being struck by the fact that the Church on earth was not only formed by the Holy Spirit, but was maintained by men who were filled with the Holy Spirit, and acting in the power of the Spirit by spiritual means. On the day of Pentecost the disciples were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Brought before the rulers, Peter is filled with the Spirit when he confounds his opponents. Later we read "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and they spake the word of God with boldness." To meet the temporal needs of believers, men were appointed full of the Holy Ghost. The adversaries of Stephen could not resist the Spirit by which he spoke, and at his martyrdom "he being filled with the Holy Spirit looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God."

From this rapid survey of these early scenes it is manifest that whether it was the formation of the Church, or the maintenance of the Church against the attacks of the enemy; whether it was preaching to sinners or ministering to the saints, all was one in the power of the Holy Spirit, and by men who were filled with the Spirit. There was an entire absence of all the religious machinery and carnal methods by which the varied religious systems of today seek to conduct their services and retain their hold on the people.

It must be plain that if all were walking in the Spirit, we should be perfectly joined together, in the same mind and in the same judgment. There would be no occasion for a divided judgment. There may indeed be different apprehensions of divine truth, — some see farther than others, — but if controlled by the same Spirit all look in the same direction. There may be different views of the same object even as the gospels present different views of the life of Christ yet all are in perfect accord because presented by the same Spirit. (1 Cor. 12: 4, 8, 9, 11).

What then is the cause of strife and divisions? Does it not lie in the fact that in the Christian there are two opposing powers, the flesh and the Spirit, and these are contrary the one to the other. To be in

agreement with one another we must be controlled by the same power. If two Christians are controlled by the Holy Spirit they *will* be in accord. If both are controlled by the flesh they may be in accord. But if one is controlled by the Spirit and the other by the flesh there must be conflict, for "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." There must be strife when the flesh and the Spirit come into collision whether it be in an individual or in a company. (Gal. 5: 17)

Now the movement to which we have referred called for and necessitated a spirituality for which the mass were not prepared. So it came to pass with the increase of numbers there was a decrease of spirituality. The flesh acted and fleshly methods crept in with the result that there was collision between those seeking to walk together in the line of the Spirit and those acting in a more fleshly way. It has been truly said "the more we investigate, the better we shall see that the cause of strife generally between any two Christians is, that one has allowed human considerations of some kind to sway him, while the other, with a more single eye, considers for the Lord only."

Here then lies one great root cause of all divisions. We have not walked, nor held the truth, in the power and grace of the Holy Spirit; nor submitted to His guidance and control, with the result that there has been the increasing intrusion of the flesh, and its methods, leading to endless strife, confusion and division.

There is, however, as we have said, another great cause of divisions; we have not held the Head. One has said "while we have theorised about Christ as Head (and consequently as our Resource, instead of the machinery of the denominations) we have never known how to use Him when difficulty has come in. Where we should have referred the matter to Him, and waited for His solution, there has been the impatience and zeal of the flesh that would put forth its hand for the steadying of the Ark with the resultant smiting from the hand of the Lord." We have held the truth of the Head, we would have died for the truth, and yet all the time it may be, we have not held the Head. To hold the truth of the Head is merely to hold the doctrine, and so far right; but to hold the Head is to turn to the One who is the Head and use the resources that are in Him as the Head. We have made the mistake of looking for power and wisdom and guidance in the Church and our conceptions of it; and thus in our difficulties and perplexities we have looked to teachers, leaders, and gifted men in the Church, rather than to the One who is the Head of the Church and in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead. We have not turned to Him and spread out before Him all our difficulties and differences of judgment. With a measure of knowledge of divine principles we have assumed competency to apply these principles in the difficulties that have arisen, forgetting that however correct our principles they can only be rightly applied under the direction, and by the wisdom and perfect knowledge of the Head. We have discussed difficulties amongst ourselves, and trusted in men rather than in Christ the Head; with the result that we have been left very largely to our own devices. As we read of the godly Hezekiah, there came a moment in his history when "God *left* him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chron. 32: 31). We have failed to hold the Head and we have been "left" to do what is right in our own eyes, and the outcome has been sorrow upon sorrow and division upon division.

Moreover, have we not failed in the maintenance of that holy separation which in the beginning was such a prominent mark of this spiritual movement, and without which all else is in vain? In the history of the remnant who returned from the captivity to build the house of the Lord, the first attack of the enemy was an effort to break down their holy separation by the attempt to form an unequal alliance to do the work of the Lord (Ezra 4: 2). And so also in regard to those who, in obedience to the Word, have gone forth from the great religious systems which have been formed by sincere men after the pattern of the Camp (Heb. 13: 13), has there not been a constant effort by the enemy to entangle them again in these systems, and thus lead them to surrender or nullify the great truths concerning Christ and

the Church which can only be held and enjoyed by a separated people? As we have seen with the remnant in the days of Ezra, the plea of service to the Lord's people and furthering the Lord's work, has been constantly advanced in order to justify a return to, or service in connection with, these corrupt religious systems in which so many of God's dear people are held in bondage. Those caught by this snare forget that the measure of our preparation for the Master's use is the measure of our separation from all that is contrary to the Lord outwardly and inwardly (2 Tim. 2: 19-22). We do well to remember that if we have separated from these systems in spite of true people of God being in them, it cannot be right to return to these systems because they are there. Furthermore, we must not forget that *the Lord knows full well how to care for His beloved sheep wherever they may be found, and that He will not let them suffer because we, in obedience to His word and faithfulness to Himself, refuse to go back to the systems in which they may be found.*

These then are, we believe, the great root causes of division — we have not maintained separation — we have not walked in the Spirit — we have not held the Head. Moreover, a little thought will show that the root causes of the divisions that have marred this last great movement of the Spirit of God, are the same causes that brought all the ruin into the early Church. The practical setting aside of the Holy Spirit by fleshly expedients, the absolute ignoring of the Church's Head in heaven by setting up a visible head on earth, and the formation of unholy alliances with the world, are the outstanding sins of Christendom, which have involved the ruin of the Church on earth and are leading to the final apostacy. As we have seen, the Spirit of God, in the last century, led a great number of the people of God to separate from the systems of men to walk in the light of the truth as taught in the epistles, and maintained in the Church at the beginning; but, alas, very soon there came breakdown in practice by falling into the failures of the Church in its early days, when it departed from first love and allowed the world a place inside. The result is, as with Israel of old, the enemy is at the gate and there are breaches in the wall.

EFFORTS TO HEAL THE BREACHES.

Like Israel of old many have fallen into the snare (that looks so commendable and plausible) of endeavouring to heal the breaches by human efforts and human expedients. These efforts have taken two forms.

First, an effort has been made to heal the breaches by leaders in different sections of brethren conferring together in the hope of removing difficulties and coming to some understanding.

Second, an effort has been made, and is still being made, on the part of more or less gifted individuals to bring about healing by ministering in meetings where they would not or could not break bread.

Both are the worldly methods adopted by the religious world with the hope of removing the scandal of the great religious sects, and of arriving at some form of religious unity. The one by ecclesiastical conferences and the other by exchange of pulpits. Seeing the true character of these methods, as being merely human expedients savouring of the world and its principles, there can be little wonder that both have signally failed.

The reason of this failure is fairly obvious. As to the first method — the attempt to stop the breaches by way of conference — it must be clear that if any healing could be accomplished on the ground of a few leading brothers having settled their differences it could hardly be anything but an amalgamation of parties which would set aside the great principles of the Church of God, and leave the

consciences of the mass totally unexercised. Moreover, such conferences have been almost wholly occupied with discussing details of doctrines and practices in the past which were believed to be the primary cause of these divisions. The inevitable result has been that each sought to justify his own position. In a word, these conferences were concerned with second causes rather than with the great first causes of division to which we have already referred. Occupied with second causes it is easy to find much that is right, and much that is wrong, on all sides. Occupied with first causes we should have found in our common failure a common ground of confession before the Lord.

As to the second method — certain brothers essaying to minister where they cannot break bread — it may well be advanced that to associate in preaching and ministry with those with whom I cannot identify myself in the breaking of bread in their community is to place the need of man, and the care of saints, on a higher plane than the glory of Christ. If some solemn matter has arisen which prevents my having fellowship with saints in the highest and holiest of Christian privileges, how can I consistently have fellowship with them in service? To ignore the higher claim while endeavouring to carry out the lower is surely putting a slight upon Christ. Moreover, those who act upon this principle are generally, sooner or later, drawn back into the great systems of men from which they formerly separated, under the plea of helping the Lord's people in these systems. They ask, "What harm is there in joining in the work of the Lord with those with whom we cannot break bread?" But it is not long before such reverse their question and, with every show of reason, ask, "Why not break bread with those with whom we work?" The result being that such slip back into the worldly religious systems from which they had nominally separated. They may plead it is a matter of service, and to their own Master they stand and fall. This may be said in all sincerity, but too often we fear, perhaps unconsciously, the Lord's holy name is being used to cover the solemn fact that they are doing what is right in their own eyes. Alas! how many names can be recalled of those who, under the plea of wider service and greater usefulness, have abandoned the path of separation and have been lured back into the great systems of corrupt Christendom, or into a wider and more conscienceless association with representatives of *every* system, while claiming that they do not belong to any. Such are now building again the things that once they destroyed. They little thought to go the lengths that they have gone, but, starting on an inclined plane they found circumstances too powerful for them. This is because such have confused "testimony" with "fellowship." It is indeed our privilege to testify the truth to saints and sinners, but if we are to remain faithful to the truth and to the Lord, it must be apart from all fellowship with the systems in which many of the saints may be found; otherwise we shall drop into a form of "independency" and self-will which on the part of some even gifted men, has caused so much distress and confusion among the Lord's people.

Thus we fear that *both* these efforts to stop the breaches have not only signally failed, but worse, they have tended to further scatter the Lord's people, have accentuated their differences, and enlarged the very breaches that they desired to stop. Like Israel of old, they have *broken down houses* to build up breaches. If then all these efforts have failed, it may well be asked

WHAT ARE WE TO DO IN THE PRESENCE OF DIVISIONS?

In the first place we must ever remember that if "brethren" so-called had never divided, or if, by some miracle of grace, they were all together again, they would still be but a little remnant, The Church would still be broken and ruined. The mere coming together again of brethren would very well content many, but would it content the Lord? Viewing things from our standpoint our vision becomes contracted, our interests limited, and our affections cramped. Did we but see things from *the Lord's* standpoint we should feel more deeply the condition of the whole Church, and our part with it in all the

evil and confusion that has come into the house of God through our failure in responsibility.

However, just as the remnant in Haggai's day, though forming part of all Israel, were distinguished from their brethren in captivity, and had special messages from the Lord, and were dealt with in a special way by the Lord, so may we not say that those in our day, who have received the light of the Church, and seek to walk according to this light, are in a place of special privilege with special responsibilities, though united with all Christians to form the house of God, and sharing in the ruin of that house?

With this reminder, let us confine our thoughts, for the moment, to the divisions among those called "Brethren." Again we ask, does Scripture give us any light as to what is the right course to pursue in the presence of these divisions? Doubtless many Scriptures contain principles that will guide us, and amongst others may we not say that the passage we have quoted from the prophet Isaiah, has great instruction for us in the presence of our failure, as indeed it had for Israel in the day of their failure?

We have seen that the prophet reproaches Israel in the day of their perplexity with not discerning the hand of the Lord in all their troubles. If the enemy was at the gate, if there were breaches in the walls, they failed to see that it was "by" or "from the Lord." First then, learning by their failure, let us unreservedly own that because of our folly *the hand of the Lord is upon us in discipline*. In the address to Laodicea, presenting the last phase of the professing Church on earth under the gaze of the Lord, He sees on the one hand the great mass of unreal profession which He is about to spue out of His mouth: on the other hand He sees His own — those whom He loves — and such He chastens. Has not the day come when we either belong to those who are loathed and spued out of His mouth, or to those who are loved and chastened by His hand? Looking beyond all second causes which may instrumentally have brought about division, let us see clearly, and definitely admit, that because of our failure these breaches are "from the Lord." It is not that, by so speaking, we charge the Lord with our sin and failure but behind all these troubles and because of our sin and failure, we see the hand of the Lord. No one would charge the Lord with the sin of stirring up strife among the Lord's people, and yet because of the low condition of the Ezra remnant the Lord says, "I set all men everyone against his neighbour" (Zech. 8: 9, 10). Moreover, if we are broken and divided under the chastening of the Lord it behoves us to beware lest we "despise" the chastening of the Lord on the one hand, or "faint" under it on the other. To say, as some do, "Divisions are all wrong and therefore we ignore them, and minister, or even break bread, wherever we can" is to ignore the fact that divisions exist under the chastening of the Lord, in a word, to despise His chastening — an intensely solemn thing. On the other hand to surrender divine principles and abandon the path of separation because of our failure, is to "faint" under the chastening of the Lord. We have been too apt to view division in relation to our brethren and the way they have treated us, or we have treated them, rather than view them in relation to the Lord and the way we have treated Him. We have said, "We are divided because so-and-so did a wrong act or propounded a wrong doctrine," instead of saying, "We are divided because we have failed to give Christ His place as Head in whom is all the fulness of the Godhead, all power and all wisdom for every possible difficulty that could arise in the history of the Church." The Lord has allowed us to discover that it is much easier to divide than to come together again.

Secondly, we have seen that in the day of Israel's trouble and perplexity they made efforts to stop the breaches, and they looked to their armour, but they did not look unto the Lord. Here surely we have another great lesson — not only let us own that all that has come upon us is "from the Lord," but, abandoning our own puny efforts to stop the breaches, *let us whole-heartedly turn to the Lord*. The point of departure must of necessity be the point of recovery. As we have seen, "Not holding the Head"

was the point of departure, to turn to the Head, as our all-sufficient resource is the way of recovery. It should deeply touch us that the very One we have so deeply wronged — whom we have slighted and grieved — is the only One to whom we can turn in our sin and shame. It is far easier to set to work to repair the breaches than to bow before the Lord in confession of the sin that caused the breaches. One has said "It suits the flesh in us far more to repair a breach and so present a respectable appearance, than to bow in confession and own the hand of the Lord dealing in faithfulness with that which He loves" (Rev. 3: 19).

Finally the inhabitants of Jerusalem were rebuked for feasting and drinking at the very time when the Lord called for weeping and mourning. If it is right to steadfastly set our faces against all human efforts to patch up the breaches, does it therefore mean that we must quietly acquiesce in the fact that the Lord's people are divided? Are we to settle down in heartless indifference to the saints from whom we are divided? Far be such a thought. But it may be asked "What else is there to do?" There is one thing we can do — and only one — we can humble ourselves before the Lord and cry mightily to the One who has said "I will close up the breaches" (Amos 9: 11). In the presence of the breaches we may well look to God that our hearts may be burdened with the sense of our sin and shame, so that with hearts moved to their depths we may confess our sin to the Lord and cry mightily to Him, and wait, and wait upon Him, for who can tell whether He will be gracious to us, and how far He might grant some measure of healing; and who can say that even yet there may not be some distinct movement of the Spirit of God in [the early part of] this century as in the preceding centuries? Whether it will be so, or what form it might take none can forecast. God is sovereign and will maintain His sovereignty in spite of all that we are. It is ours to cast ourselves upon Him confessing our failure and the common failure of the Church. Such confession, commencing perhaps with only a few, might spread to a very great number being brought to confession before the Lord. The first movement of the Spirit in dealing with unholy alliances formed by the people who returned from the captivity, commenced with *one man*. Ezra alone pours out his soul before God, saying, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee" (Ezra 9: 6). But the effect of one man's acting by the Spirit was very great, for we read "When Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God there assembled unto him out of Israel *a very great congregation* of men and women and children, for the people wept very sore."

Thus in the presence of these sad divisions our only godly course is to unreservedly own that the Lord's hand is upon us in discipline, to turn to the Lord as our only and sufficient resource, and humble ourselves under His mighty hand in confession of our sin and shame.

If, by a special work of the Spirit of God in our day "a very great congregation" of the people of God, in all parts of the earth were stirred to humble themselves in confession before God, it might be answered by that long looked for moment when the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, when the sleeping saints shall be raised, when the living saints will be changed, and when at last His scattered and long divided saints "shall be caught up *together*" to be for ever with the Lord.

H. S.

NOTE.

From the foregoing remarks it might be concluded that the possibility of local healing between divided saints is ignored.

Where there is a growing acquaintance with the truths of the Assembly on the part of two local

companies, their common exercises may draw them together in the confession of their departure from these truths. If such humble themselves under the chastening hand of the Lord, it may result in the Lord bringing them together to walk once again in the light of the Assembly. Such cases, though rare, are not unknown.

On the other hand it must not be forgotten, that two divided companies may find themselves together through gradual decline from the truth of the Assembly. By the loss of these truths and the consequent lack of godly exercise, they may find themselves together on common ground, but, alas, on lower ground than that of the Assembly, thus only adding to the confusion amongst the Lord's people. Such cases are only too common.