

Our Lord's Miracles.

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Foreword

We are living in a sceptical age. Men say they no longer believe in miracles. Not in heathendom is this said, but in Christendom, where the light of the Gospel shines. There is but one more step to take, in this unbelief — the repudiation of God Himself. This step will be taken shortly. MAN will deify himself in the son of perdition — the Antichrist of Scripture (2 Thess. 2: 3-4). When this happens, no more place will be found for God and His Son. Remarkably, when this state of things comes about, men will believe in miracles once more. "Signs and lying wonders" will appear, and be credited. Hell produces its marvels as well as heaven. This was witnessed in Moses' day, and it will be witnessed again in the day of Antichrist.

Infidelity, religious and otherwise, may carp at the records of our Lord's miracles, but the miracles were wrought, nevertheless. The fact that at least three of the Gospels were published within a few years of our Lord's ascension, when falsehoods could easily have been disproved, is sufficient to establish their credibility, even on the most human principles. But when we take into account the august fact (which every reverent soul believes) that the Spirit of God is the Author of the Gospels every query is hushed to rest.

But why were the miracles wrought? The Saviour Himself tells us — "the works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me" (John 5: 36; John 10: 25). They were thus graciously granted as aids to faith in His person and mission. Hence the rebuke to Philip, "Believe Me for the very works' sake." Hence, too, the Saviour's lament in John 15: 24: "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father." Because the miracles were aids to faith they were all, with one exception, acts of mercy — acts which should have appealed to the sensibilities of all concerned as showing out the divine heart towards man.

It would be as foolish to over-state the value of miracles as it is to affect contempt for them. Aids to faith must not be confounded with the ground of faith. Faith founded on miracles is of so little worth that the Saviour, when surrounded by believers of this sort, refused to commit Himself unto them (John 2: 23-25). True faith is founded on the Word of God (Rom. 10: 17). Simon Magus was attracted by miracles, and proved a fraud; Sergius Paulus desired to hear the Word of God, and so became a true disciple (Acts 8: 13; Acts 13: 7, 12).

W. W. F.

The Leper Cleansed.

He who believes in a God Almighty and Supreme can have no difficulty in crediting miracles, especially when they are vouched for in God-breathed Scriptures. The objection that miracles are inconsistent with natural laws is beside the mark, seeing that they have nothing to do with natural laws, being instead sovereign interpositions of God altogether apart from, and above, them. No greater miracles can be conceived than the momentous facts on which Christianity rests — the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He who bows in faith to these will necessarily regard all other marvels as small in comparison. He who turns away from the facts of Christ's miraculous incarnation, etc., has no claim whatever to be recognised as a Christian.

Our Lord's miracles were not mere works of power; nor were they simply expressions of love and sympathy toward those who benefited by them: they were truly all this; but they were also intended to

teach spiritual truths. The cleansing of the leper is recorded by all the evangelists excepting John. Matthew gives it in the opening verses of his eighth chapter. Guided by the Spirit of God, Matthew disregards historical sequence in his presentation of it, placing the miracle after the Sermon in the Mount, although it took place some time earlier. His object apparently was to put in strong contrast the low faith of the Jewish sufferer with the high faith of the Gentile centurion described in the verses immediately following.

Leprosy is a type of sin. Those under its terrible power were as unfit for God's 'earthly dwelling-place as unpurged sinners are for His heavenly abode. The only physician for leprosy was God Himself; the same gracious One can alone meet the need of those polluted by sin. In answer to the leper's appeal our Lord "put forth His hand and touched him." Contact with the diseased one conveyed no defilement to Him, but it conveyed healing to the sufferer. Beautiful picture of the grace which brought Him from above into man's circumstances; touching sin, so to speak, at every point, yet personally unstained from first to last. The leper's faltering "If Thou wilt, Thou canst" was at once answered by the Saviour's hearty "I will; be thou clean." To His ability and willingness to heal and to bless there is no limit; whatever limitations there be are in the trembling faith of the human heart.

The healed one was then bidden "show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them." A striking testimony indeed, seeing that this was the first Israelitish leper cleansed (so far as Scripture speaks) since the instructions of Lev. 13 & Lev. 14 were given nearly 1,500 years before. The presence of a cleansed leper at the altar with his two birds in his hands testified that God had come into the land, and was meeting men's need apart altogether from priestly ministrations and religious ordinances. A principle this of the greatest possible moment for our souls today. Cleansing for the soul is found, not in human doing of any kind, but in the fountain of the Saviour's blood. This, when divinely applied, makes the vilest sinner whiter than snow, a greater moral miracle than the physical wonder wrought upon the Jewish leper.

The Centurion's Servant.

During our Lord's ministry in Israel only two persons were specially commended by Him for their faith, and they were both Gentiles — the Syro-phenician woman, and the Roman centurion of Matt. 8: 5-13 and Luke 7: 1-10. Religious formalism had so checked the development of faith amongst the chosen people that it was scarcely to be found within their circle.

It was but a slave concerning whom the centurion appealed to the Saviour, but he was, for some reason, precious in his sight. In contrast with many in Israel, the Roman discerned God in the person of the lowly Carpenter Who was traversing the province. He at once made his supplication to Him, and was answered, "I will come and heal him." He instantly begged the Lord to take no such trouble, arguing that it was not even necessary. "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. It was this that excited our Lord's commendation — his confidence in the efficacy of His word when personally absent. We have here a principle that is vital to us at the present hour. Christ is not here, having gone up to the Father's throne. But His Word is with us in the Scriptures we may at all times hear His living voice. His word declares the efficacy of His one sacrifice (Heb. 10: 12); it proclaims the pardon and justification of all who believe in His name (Acts 13: 38-39); and it gives to all such the sweet assurance that eternal life is already theirs, and that into judgement they can never come (John 5: 24). On His Word we rest; it is our all, seeing that Himself is no longer with us. If His Word could be wrested from our hands, our darkness would be impenetrable.

There are striking differences between the two accounts of this miracle, as given to us by Matthew and Luke. They are due, not to any blundering on the part of the writers, but to the special guidance of the Holy Spirit, Who indicated to each what features should be introduced, and what should be omitted. Thus Matthew, on the one hand, who wrote with Israel specially in view, appends our Lord's solemn warning to that nation that many should come from afar, and be blessed with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, while the sons of the kingdom should be cast out. Such a word was most necessary for a people who were building their hopes on religious associations and privileges, to the neglect of personal faith. Luke, on the other hand, who was himself a Gentile, and wrote for Gentiles, omits the warning to Israel, and introduces instead, what is so instructive to Gentiles, the fact that the centurion in the first instance got the Jewish elders to plead for him with the Saviour. If the warning noted by Matthew was intended to humble Jewish pride, this feature added by Luke should suffice to depress Gentile conceit. Are we not apt to forget that, as a matter of fact, we owe everything to the Jew? The Scriptures, the Saviour the first preachers of Christianity, all came to us from the bosom of Israel. Had this been remembered, Abraham's children would not have to complain of centuries of oppression from "Christian" hands.

The slave was healed. Such faith as his master evinced could not be denied. Nor will faith in the Word of the absent Saviour ever fail to receive fullest acknowledgment from God.

Peter's Wife's Mother.

Those who reverence the Scriptures and believe in their divine inspiration will have no hesitation in believing that a spiritual reason accounts for Matthew's displacement of this incident in his Gospel narrative. For he records it after the cases of the leper and the centurion's servant, while comparison with Mark and Luke makes it certain that it occurred some time anterior to them both.

The dispensational character of Matthew's Gospel is the true explanation of this seeming disorder. The first seventeen verses of his eighth chapter furnish us with a group of incidents that are most Interesting when viewed in the light of the dispensational ways of God. Thus the healing of the leper by the touch of Jesus is a picture characteristic of the time of our Lord's personal presence on earth. He was in closest contact with Israel from day to day, prepared to bestow every blessing upon the nation, yet meeting with but feeble response in the way of faith. The healing of the centurion's servant by His word spoken at a distance shows what is happening at the present time. He is no longer personally amongst us, but His Word is with us, and multitudes of Gentiles are finding blessing through faith in its wonderful message. The restoration of Peter's wife's mother is a picture beforehand of what He will do when His present gracious work amongst the nations is concluded. He will turn once more in His goodness to Israel, of which people Peter's mother-in-law was a representative. She lay sick of a great fever when the Lord found her, but one touch of His hand sufficed for her complete recovery. In like manner He will find her nation on the verge of utter ruin in the day when His feet shall stand once more on the Mount of Olives, but His personal presence will be as efficacious for Israel's full deliverance as for the raising up of Peter's wife's mother so long ago. Neither Zionist Congresses nor the favour of European powers will succeed in terminating Israel's centuries of sorrow; that blessed consummation is absolutely certain, if Scripture is to be believed, is dependent upon the appearing of the Son of Man. When the Redeemer comes to Zion He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob, and all Israel will be saved (Rom. 21: 26).

The apostle's mother-in-law being treated, the day closed with large blessing. Crowds of sufferers of every kind assembled round her door, and found healing and sympathy from the gracious One. Even

so will it be at the close of the present age. When the twelve tribes of Israel are restored to their inheritance, and once more enjoy divine favour, universal peace and blessing will prevail. The world groans increasingly under its intolerable burdens, and schemes not a few are ventilated from time to time for the mitigation of them, but all efforts in this direction will be futile until earth's rightful King returns. His order in that day will be as follows: first, Israel blessed; then, all nations by their means. Meanwhile, pardon and salvation are available for individuals, however numerous, who will put their trust in the Saviour's precious blood.

The Storm on the Lake.

If men failed to recognise their Creator when He condescended to tabernacle here in flesh creation acknowledged His presence and power. The storm described in Matt. 8: 23-27 took place at the close of the day on which the seven parables of Matt. 13 were delivered. Tired with His day's labour, the Saviour slept, a touching proof of the reality of the humanity which He had assumed. Presently one of Gennesaret's sudden storms burst upon the little boat, to the dismay of the disciples, who, though believers, but feebly realised who it was that was voyaging with them. Had they considered that He was the Creator of the universe, would they have experienced a moment's alarm. Was it not He Who, ages before, shut up the sea with doors, and made clouds the garments thereof, and Who said, "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed"? (Job 38: 8-11). Would, or could, the sea engulf its own Lord and God?

Alas for the poor human heart! Mark, with his customary observance of details, tells us the disciples roughly awoke their Lord, crying, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish. It is painful to transcribe the words; how cruelly they must have wounded the tender susceptibilities of the Saviour! "Carest Thou not." Had He not cared for the children of men, He would have remained in His own glory; the Bethlehem manger, the Galilean boat, and the cross of Calvary would never have been His lot. Yet, so gracious is He, no word of censure escaped His lips for the heartlessness of their speech; He merely said, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Well has it been said, "Never man spake like this Man." But how painful to Him to find such feebleness of faith amongst the special objects of His favour after His experience of the splendid faith of the Gentile centurion!

His voice sufficed for the stilling of the elements. "Peace, be still." Long before this incarnation the Psalmist wrote of Him, "Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, Thou stillest them" (Ps. 89: 9). Not a single attribute of Deity did He lay aside on becoming man. Omnipotence and Omniscience shone forth in Him whenever occasion called for their display. Demons, disease, death, winds and waves all fled before His word. The human mind, however richly taught of God, can unravel the mystery of the union of the divine and the human natures in His Person. Reason has insoluble difficulties here; faith finds instead material for adoration and praise.

The miracle brought the disciples to His feet in wonder, not unmixed with dread. What manner of Man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him? The answer is simple and plain. He was God manifested in flesh, on His way to death for the eternal blessing of all who believe. But in His humiliation, as now in His glory, He had power to dispel every danger that could befall His people. Storms of various kinds may burst upon us during our passage through this world, but none can destroy us while Jesus lives. Our part is just to confide in Him.

The Two Demoniacs.

Man's subjection to the power of Satan is the fruit of the fall, and is a terrible reality not to be underrated. On various occasions the Saviour, when here, was confronted by persons possessed with demons. This, while a special affliction in individual cases, is a picture of every unregenerate man's spiritual condition.

The prince of the power of the air regulates the present course of things here, working in all the children of disobedience (Eph. 2: 2). Yielding themselves to his authority, men become his slaves (Rom. 6: 16). One of the most blatant. proofs of this awful condition of things is modern Spiritualism.

Matthew tells us of two demoniacs who met our Lord on the eastern side of the Lake of Galilee, as He stepped ashore from His stormy passage (Matt. 8: 28-34). Remarkably, both Mark and Luke speak of one only. This probably is because one case was more desperate than the other, and the second and third evangelists were led to concentrate their attention upon him; while Matthew who always wrote with Jewish readers before his mind, and who knew the weight two witnesses would have with such (Deut. 17: 6; Deut. 19: 15), was careful to record the fact that two men were blessed, even though he omits a crowd of other details.

However blind men might be, to the personal glory of Jesus, demons always recognised Him as their Lord, and trembled and cringed before Him. Knowing Him to be the dread Judge Who will, at the opening of His reign, consign them and their leader to the abyss (Rev. 20: 1), they implored Him not to dismiss them to that awful region before the time. In answer to their prayer? they were suffered to enter into a herd of swine, with the result that the whole two thousand rushed violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished.

The whole countryside turned out at the tidings of what had occurred. They found the once-possessed men sitting peacefully at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in their right mind. All their devilish ferocity, which had made them the terror of the district, was gone for ever. Yet not gratitude but aversion seized the minds of the people, and they forthwith besought the Saviour to depart out of their coasts. Two men had been delivered from the hold of Satan, but at the cost of two thousand swine. Were two souls worth two thousand swine? In their deplorable blindness, they judged not. If such was to be the result of the presence of the Son of God, they would prefer Satan for their neighbour. Such conduct would be incredible, did we not see men at the present hour sacrificing their own souls for trifles lighter than air. What matters it that the Saviour, by the shedding of His precious blood, has acquired the right to emancipate from Satan's power every soul that longs for deliverance? In the judgement of many, business, wealth, pleasure, are all to be preferred to any blessing He can bestow.

The Palsied Man

This miracle of healing was wrought at Capernaum, the city adopted by the Saviour as His home after He gave up Nazareth. It did not take place after His return from Gadara; this incident, though reserved for the opening verses of Matthew 9, occurred immediately after the cleansing of the leper recorded in Matt. 8: 2-5.

Every physical disease healed by the Saviour typifies in one way or another the moral disease of sin. Thus leprosy pictures the sinner in his uncleanness; fever shows him in his restlessness; while palsy is the expressive type of utter helplessness. Rom. 5:6 comes to mind here-"when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." Most merciful provision for a palsied race!

Four friends brought the sufferer to Jesus. In their earnestness they refused to be thwarted by the crowds that barred the door, so they let down the couch, through the roof, at His feet. His first words to the palsied man were not words of healing but of pardon. "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." Unquestionably the soul is of greater importance than the body. The forgiveness of sins is a mightier boon than the most perfect physical health. Our Lord's words provoked some unuttered criticisms on the part of some of His audience. "This man blasphemeth." Omniscience in Him read their thoughts, and He rebuked them forthwith. Who can forgive sins but God only?" The query was reasonable. What mortal man has ever had such authority granted to him by God? But He Whom the scribes misjudged soon gave ample proof that He was God indeed by bidding the man take up his bed, and go to his house. "That ye may know that the Son of man hath authority on earth to forgive sins." Every Jewish student of Dan. 7 would know that the Son of man is identical with the Ancient of Days (vv. 9, 13, 22). If He be really the Son of man of prophecy, then is He most truly divine.

His less critical observers went home saying, 'We have seen strange things today.' Had their spiritual vision been undimmed they would have recognised that Ps. 103: 3 "Who forgiveth all thy iniquities, Who healeth all thy diseases" had been fulfilled before their eyes, and each tongue would have exclaimed, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." It was men's unbelief in these wonders so often repeated in favoured Capernaum, which constrained Him to say at a later date, "Thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgement than for thee" (Matt. 11: 23-24). Privileges unvalued entail severest judgement from God. How far does this principle apply to our favoured land?

Jairus' Daughter.

During the world's preparatory ages, i.e. the ages that preceded Christ's coming, the divine dealings were especially with the people of Israel. The result of all God's dealings with that nation was to make manifest the true condition of our race. The human heart having been proved to be incorrigibly evil in the most favoured of the families of the earth, it goes without saying that it is irretrievably evil everywhere.

The case of Jairus' daughter (Matt. 9: 18-26) illustrates these principles. Mark and Luke tell us that she was dying when her father first petitioned the Saviour on her behalf, and that he heard of her death from a messenger who was sent after him; Matthew shortens his report of the occurrence by commencing with her death. Her case was thus hopeless as far as man was concerned, even though her parent, as a ruler of the synagogue, was an authorised exponent of the law of Jehovah. The dead maid furnishes us with a picture of Israel dead — spiritually dead — in spite of ages of possession of God's law. It had not imparted life to Israel; it was impossible, therefore, that it could impart righteousness. If it could not supply man's first need, it certainly could not supply his second need. "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law" (Gal. 3: 21). Yet in utter blindness as to their true condition, Israel has unceasingly sought righteousness by means of works of law. Gentiles have no more learned the lesson of human ruin than the chosen people; hence the painful fact that in this Gospel day the majority of persons in Christendom are striving after blessing on the principle of works in one form or another.

Jairus felt deeply the powerlessness of all ecclesiastical and legal machinery in the presence of death, and he therefore made his application to the Son of God. With His usual tenderness, the Saviour

said to the distressed parent, "Be not afraid; only believe." Taking with Him Peter, James and John only, He entered into the death-chamber and forthwith overcame death by His quickening word. It sufficed for Him to say 'Damsel, arise,' and immediately her spirit returned from the unseen world, and became reunited with the body. Blessed earnest of what the same gracious One will accomplish in a spiritual way for her entire nation when He comes again!

Meanwhile, the principle is stamped indelibly on the page of Scripture that man is dead in the eyes of God. It is vain to preach good works and religious ordinances to the dead. Why should we Gentiles foolishly essay to reach blessing by means that have signally failed in the case of Israel. Not law works but Christ can alone meet man's deep need. Hence His own gracious declaration: "For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3: 16).

The Issue of Blood.

The woman who touched the Saviour's garment has always been an object of peculiar interest to devout readers of Scripture. Her painful case, and the simplicity of her faith, never fail to arouse our spiritual sympathies. Her case was an interruption of our Lord's mission to raise Jairus' daughter. She is thus a type of those who are today seeking and receiving blessing while our Lord's relations with Israel are suspended. The fact that the woman's case is interwoven with that of Jairus' daughter serves to bring out clearly the parts that both God and man play in the blessing of the soul. The girl, like every unregenerate sinner, was dead; Who Can quicken the dead but God? The woman exercised her faith; this God looks for in all who would receive His favours. God's part is to quicken: man's part is to believe.

A vast multitude thronged the streets of the little port of Capernaum. They were following Jesus to the ruler's house. He who judged by appearances would have concluded that the whole country was in love with the Son of God. But as it was in Capernaum, so it is now in Christendom — many follow from mere curiosity, many go because others go; but only individuals here and there, like the woman of our story, seek Him because their hearts yearn for that which He alone can supply. The woman was now penniless. During twelve years she had been vainly seeking health at the hands of Jewish physicians. Why did she not earlier make her application to the great Healer of all? She reflects, only too sadly, those in our day who, in their quest for salvation try everything and everyone rather than the Son of God. Sacraments, teetotalism, benevolence, and a crowd of other remedies, are trusted in by various souls for that which He alone can give. When the woman came to the conclusion that her only hope lay in the Lord Jesus, she formed her resolution accordingly "If I can touch but His clothes, I shall be whole" (Mark 5: 28). Marvellous faith! She had acquired such confidence in Him that she believed one touch of His fringe with its blue ribbon attached (Num. 15: 37-41) would suffice for her complete healing.

The Saviour was aware of what was passing, and to the astonishment of Peter and the others He turned and inquired, 'Who touched Me?' As then so now, He carefully distinguishes between the thoughtless crowd of religious adherents and the earnest individual seeker after blessing. Calling the woman before Him, and eliciting her frank confession of what had taken place, He dismissed her home with the comforting assurance, "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace" (Luke 8:48)- It is good to have to do with One so gracious as He. The humble seeker after spiritual healing has but to claim an interest in His precious blood, and pardon, salvation, and peace become the heart's portion for ever. We believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall

be saved" Acts 15: 11).

The Blind and the Dumb.

The cases of the two blind men and the dumb demoniac recorded in Matt. 9: 27-34 are found only in the first Gospel. They apparently followed immediately upon the raising of Jairus' daughter. Taken together, these fresh incidents furnish us with a sadly complete picture of man in his natural condition. Toward God man is stone-blind. His eyes are open widely enough to the concerns of this life, its business, pleasures, etc., but to everything spiritual he is one who sees not. What though the goodness of God, the perfections of Christ, the cleansing efficacy of His blood, and the glories of heaven are portrayed before him, he sees nothing in them to attract his blinded eyes. They are the most uninteresting of all the matters that come before him. The natural man is also as dumb as he is blind. The tongue that is so ready of speech when temporal things are being discussed, collapses into utter silence when God and Christ are introduced. Concerning the highest and best of all topics he has absolutely nothing to say. His tongue is tied.

There is but One who can open blind eyes and set at liberty tongues that are dumb. The Gospel is sent to men "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 26: 18). When the blind men were brought into the house of our Lord, He asked them, "Believe ye that I am able to do this" They replied, "Yea, Lord." Instantly the healing touch was given, and the inestimable boon of sight was granted to them. Men spiritually blind and dumb are equally welcome to the Saviour. One touch Of His gracious hand, sought in faith, and everything becomes viewed in a new light, and the delivered soul feels as one introduced into a new world. Henceforward he cries with the ecstatic apostle, "We see Jesus" (Heb. 2: 9). His eyes are enraptured with the glories of his Saviour and Lord; for the excellency of the knowledge of Him he counts everything else but loss. His tongue makes its boast in the Lord; it is continually filled with His praise. He testifies of Him burningly to all. This is surely a spiritual miracle.

We are commenting upon true cases of physical healing. In dealing with them our Lord was fulfilling what was long before predicted of Him in Isaiah 35: 5-6. The kind of miracle has ceased for the present, to reappear when the Millennial kingdom is established. But meanwhile the spiritual wonder is being enacted before our eyes every day.. The grace of God is revolutionising men's lives continually; the dead are quickened, the blind are made to see, and the dumb are made both to speak and sing. Who but our God, and what but the Gospel, could accomplish such marvels as these.

The Withered Hand.

It was the Sabbath day; and, as His custom was, our Lord repaired to the synagogue. Synagogues were not places of worship (there was but one such place in Israel-God's temple in Jerusalem); they were merely buildings in which copies of the Scriptures were kept under the charge of an official, whose duty it was to allow the people to read them, and to expound them to one another. The Saviour descried a man in the synagogue with a withered hand. His whole heart of compassion went forth at once toward him. He had but recently been criticised by the Pharisees for permitting His disciples to relieve their hunger in the cornfield on the Sabbath day; this afflicted man became a fresh ground of objection with them. According to Mark and Luke He put this question to them: "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day, or to do evil." Matthew adds the query: "What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold of it, and lift it out?"

How much then is a man better than a sheep?" (Matt. 12: 9-14).

The natural heart loves formality. Religious ordinances appeal powerfully to it. For the due observance of them according to their own thoughts, religionists have ever been ready to contend fiercely, even at the risk of Hindering 'God's work of grace. What cared the Pharisees of our Lord's day that the land was full of misery if only Sabbath forms were carried out punctiliously. Man in this day, inheriting their spirit, would rather souls go unshepherded and perish than that established customs should be touched. Nothing so deceives the heart as religion without heart-conversion to God; nothing so betrays men into the most egregious inconsistency. The men who quibbled about our Lord healing on the Sabbath day saw no wrong in plotting on that day to murder Him. At a later date, the priests abstained from crossing Pilate's threshold, lest such close contact with a Gentile should defile them and unfit them to eat the Passover; yet, it never occurred to their seared consciences that It. was infinitely more defiling to shed an innocent man's blood! Oh, religion without God, how dark has been thy record of inconsistency and sin!

The Saviour suffered nothing to hinder the out- flow of His goodness. Forms could not bind Him. Accordingly, the afflicted one was bidden to stretch forth his hand, and it was made whole as the other. Many of us suffer from withered hands at this hour. Sin has so paralysed us that we can do nothing for God. No good works can we accomplish, however deeply we may feel the necessity of them. But there is salvation in what Christ has done. His precious atoning sacrifice suffices for all our need. The man who confides in Him is blessed apart altogether from meritorious works of every kind. One result of His blessing is that the hand, once withered, becomes empowered to do somewhat for Him in the midst of a burdened and suffering creation.

The Five Thousand

A bloody deed had just been committed in the land. John the Baptist, the honoured forerunner of the Messiah, had been beheaded. Our Lord, feeling the pressure of the circumstances (for it was the shadow beforehand of His own death in the following year), retired into a desert place privately with the twelve. But He was not suffered to be quiet. Eager multitudes found Him out even in the wilderness. He did not resent it. Though men showed but little consideration to Him, in His perfect: grace He was prepared to show the fullest consideration to them. Though Israel had acquiesced in the murder of His herald, He loved Israel still.

His disciples would have dismissed the people, but He refused to send the hungry away. As a test of faith, He questioned Philip as to where bread was to be found wherewith to feed so many; He replied that two hundred denarii a labourers earnings for about eight months-would only suffice to give each a little. Andrew thereupon remarked that a lad was present with five barley loaves and two small fishes, "but what are they among so many" (John 6: 5-9). Neither of them realised that they were addressing the Creator of the universe, "Who calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4: 17). In their heartlessness they would have driven the needy away; and in their unbelief they would have starved them if they must needs remain. Such is the human heart, even in Christ's true servants!

The Lord Jesus soon showed to all that He was the God who gave the manna (Ex. 16), and also the Jehovah of Ps. 132: 15, Who said: "I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread." Accordingly He bade the multitudes sit down upon the grass in hundreds and in fifties (Mark 6: 40). Order is stamped upon all His ways, whether in creation or in grace. "God is not the author of confusion." But: before He performed what was really a stupendous miracle, He gave public

thanks for the food He was about to administer (Matt. 14: 19). Wonderful combination of human dependence and divine omnipotence in One person! In His hands the five loaves sufficed for five thousand men besides women and children, with twelve baskets full of fragments remaining. Little wonder that in an outburst of enthusiasm the people at once desired to make Him king (John 6: 15). A ruler who is a giver would be indeed a boon to long-taxed men.

The Lord refused the kingdom. It will yet be His, but He will accept it at God's hand, not at the hand of man. When the due time arrives, He will establish a visible government in Jerusalem, and will inaugurate an order of things that will fill the earth with peace and blessing. As in the day of the five thousand, so in the Millennial age, He will associate His own with Himself in the administration of the blessing. Never more will men complain of tyranny and wrong; never again will they know want. The social problems which baffle the keenest intellects at the present hour will find their perfect solution then, but not before. The cross of Calvary is the basis of future kingdom-glory and blessing, as well as the sure foundation of present pardon and peace for individuals who believe. If the world did but know it, the Redeemer-King is its only hope.

The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded by all four evangelists.

Walking on the Sea.

"How can these things be?" is a very natural question when the human mind contemplates the works and ways of God. It is, however, the query of unbelief, not of faith. Whether it be the collapse of Jericho's walls, Jonah's three days' abode in the fish's belly, our Lord's walking on the sea, or any other wonder nothing staggers the heart that has learned to trust God and believe His word.

When the Saviour refused to be made king after the feeding of the five thousand. He went up into a mountain to pray, bidding His disciples cross to the other side of the Sea of Gennesaret. It is a picture of what was soon to take place—His going up to God to enter upon His present ministry of intercession, leaving His disciples to face the billows of this stormy world during His absence. The twelve found their passage rough and trying, as followers of a rejected and crucified Lord have ever found life and testimony here. Many a storm has Satan raised in the hope of destroying all witness to the Name he hates. In the fourth watch of the night the Lord went to the disciples, walking on the water. Thinking it was an apparition, they cried out in fear, but were soon calmed by His cheery call: "It is I; (or "I am,") be not afraid." He has never failed to draw near to His own in their hours of distress and need. He is the "I am" of Ex. 3: 14. The possibilities involved in such a name forbid the smallest questioning of unbelief. "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (Ps. 46: 2).

The boat is the emblem of the old system of things in which our Lord left His disciples at His glorification. The Book of Acts shows how tenaciously they clung to the old order, with its earthly sanctuary, its successional priesthood, etc., and how very slow they were in learning that Christianity is essentially a heavenly and spiritual system: instead of being a graft upon Judaism, Christianity is its total opposite in character and spirit. Judaism, with its gorgeous ritual, appealed to the senses; he who understood Christianity better than many says, "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5: 7). Satan's aim has always been to corrupt the work of God; hence when the old boat of Judaism was destroyed by Titus he set to work to prepare another boat under Christ's name. Earthly sanctuaries, priests claiming successional rights, etc., soon appeared, to the complete falsification of the testimony of God.

Matthew, Mark and John all tell us of our Lord's walk on the water; Matthew adds another

feature (Matt. 14: 24-33). Peter, when he learned that It. was the Lord Who was approaching, begged for permission to go to Him. This being granted, he leaped into the sea, and went to Jesus. For a moment he faltered as he saw the wind and waves, but a cry from his lips and a touch from the Master's hand made his feet secure. In like manner the individual believer of today who turns his back on Christendom's religious boats, in obedience to the call in Heb. 13: 13, must look to the Lord alone for sustainment in his walk of faith. But the first act of faith, without which nothing else is possible, is the soul's humble obedience to Him for pardon and salvation.

The storm ceased when the Lord and Peter stepped aboard the boat. Similarly the world's raging will be hushed when Christ and His saints show themselves once more in the midst of Israel.

The Syrophenician Woman.

In Matt. 15: we have two hearts revealed to us — the heart of man and the heart of God. In reply to the Pharisees' criticism of His disciples for eating with unwashed hands, our Lord laid down that a man is not defiled by that which goes into his mouth, but by that which comes out, the words being the expression of what is in the heart. He proceeded to draw an appalling picture of the human heart. According to His judgement, which cannot err, it is a pestilent sink of iniquity.

Turning away from His hypocritical opponents, the Saviour went into the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon. He had but a short time before, held up these places as specially hardened (Matt. 11: 21); what could He hope to find there to refresh His distressed spirit. He was soon appealed to by a Canaanitish woman to cast a demon out of her daughter: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon." How terribly she erred! As one of a cursed race, of which remnants existed in the land merely because of the dilatoriness of God's people in Joshua's day, what could she claim from David's Son but judgement? At first the Saviour gave her no answer, but being urged by His disciples to dismiss her He said: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of Israel." This was indeed His mission at that time. He "was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Rom. 15: 8). In this character Gentiles could have no claim upon Him whatever. The earnestness of the woman, however, was such that she would take no denial. Accordingly she pressed her suit further, saying: "Lord, help me." She dropped the Jewish title of "Son of David," and craved mercy simply. But she had not gone low enough, so our Lord replied: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." This, was indeed a testing word. Yet she did not fire at it, and turn away, like Naaman, in a rage. She meekly retorted "Yea, Lord, for even the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table." (See Revised Version.) Her argument was perfect, and it prevailed. Though she was truly but a Gentile, outside the elect family of Israel, she had confidence that such was the goodness of the divine heart that there was blessing in it for even the meanest of His creatures. Certainly He whose eternal home is the Father's bosom would not contradict her in this. His strange bearing was intended to elicit this fine expression of faith from her. The Saviour's stern demeanour covered a heart of tenderness that yearned to bless her the moment she took true ground before Him. He appears to have visited the locality for her sake; for, having healed her daughter with His word, He forthwith returned to the place from whence He came. His eye had discerned the woman's sorrow from afar though she knew it not.

The secret of blessing is to take a low place at the divine feet. As born of a ruined stock, and individually guilty of sin, we have no claim on God save for judgement. But he who will humbly acknowledge himself ungodly and undone, will speedily learn that such is the heart of God towards him that He sacrificed His Only-Begotten Son for his blessing, and that in virtue of His atoning death,

sins and iniquities are remembered no more.

The Four Thousand.

The bold faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman was truly refreshing to the spirit of the, Saviour, so often distressed by the unbelief of long-favoured Israel. In like manner he finds pleasure today in the faith of Gentile believers while Israel continues estranged and scattered. Yet nothing will ever be allowed to alienate Him from the seed of Abraham; He loves them with an everlasting love, and the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. He speedily returned, therefore, from the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon, and busied Himself once more in the midst of Israel.

Needy multitudes gathered around Him (Matt. 15: 29-39). His touch sufficed for the healing of every kind of disease, and delivered ones were constrained to glorify the God of Israel. These things took place on a mountainside in Galilee. After three days of such occupation the Saviour became concerned for the feeding of the people, far removed as they were from the ordinary sources of supply. He put no testing questions to His disciples, as when the five thousand were before Him; but simply declared His compassion for the people's need, and His intention of supplying it. So forgetful is the human heart in everything where God is concerned, that the disciples, overlooking the previous miracle, expressed their doubt as to finding sufficient bread in the wilderness to feed so great a multitude. This elicited the fact that seven loaves and a few little fishes were available. This handful became mighty in the hand that once destroyed the empire of Pharaoh by means - of a humble shepherd's rod.

In simple-hearted dependence upon God (for the Son had become truly human), He offered public thanks for the temporal mercies that soon supplied the need of the vast throng before Him. Four thousand men were fed on this occasion, besides women and children. At the conclusion of the meal the fragments were gathered up, for with the absolutely perfect One waste could not accompany wealth and benevolence. Seven large baskets full remained, as compared with twelve hand-baskets full after the earlier feast. Scripture numerals are significative of spiritual truths. Seven (twice repeated in this narrative) is the number of perfection: four is the world-number. We thus learn symbolically that when He opens His hand to remedy the woes of men there will be perfection of blessing: and this, not merely for Israel's tribes, but for the whole world. This happy condition of things, however, cannot be until His return from heaven. His appearing in majesty will be the bright opening of a day fraught with peace and blessing such as the world has never yet known.

Meanwhile, from a heart fully charged with grace and goodness, divine mercy flows freely to individuals everywhere who feel their need of these things. Though the groan of the world, as such, cannot be hushed while the Saviour remains seated at the right hand of God, no individual need go unblest for a single hour. On the perfectly righteous basis of His death and resurrection, every yearning soul may have spiritual healing and pardon, and may find in the exalted Saviour Himself full satisfaction of that heart-hunger which the things of this world can never allay.

The Demoniac Boy.

It is a terrible fact that this world is under the power of Satan as its prince. The Saviour was reminded of it in a peculiarly painful manner as He descended from the holy mount after His transfiguration. He found a crowd assembled, with scribes among them, and a poor demon-possessed

lad wallowing and foaming in their midst. His disciples were there; but, through lack of faith, they were impotent in the presence of the enemy's power. Divinely commissioned and endowed though they were (Matt. 10: 1), they were unable to meet the emergency.

The Lord learned upon inquiry that the lad had suffered thus from his childhood. A picture, only too correct, of our race, which fell into the hands of Satan in its very infancy, i.e., in the days of the garden of Eden. The poor child was both dumb and deaf (Mark 9: 25), reflecting thus the spiritual condition of every representative of fallen Adam. The unregenerate man has nothing to say for God, and he has no ear for the commandments of God. God is to him as though He were not. The afflicted child was in constant peril of his life. His father said of the unclean spirit within him: "Oft-times it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters to destroy him." In like manner every undelivered sinner is in jeopardy, not of temporal disaster merely, but of eternal destruction. Man's chosen leader is truly a cruel deceiver; would that all eyes were open to the fact!

Disappointed in the disciples, who should have been able to make potent use of the Saviour's name, the despairing father turned to the Lord Himself. With no great amount of faith, however. "If Thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us" (Mark 9: 22). What words to address to the Lord of all! He Who created the universe, and all that is therein, could surely overthrow the power of Satan, a mere creature of His hand, albeit the most mighty Demons always recognised Who and what He was; men, alas, but rarely.

It is the privilege of Christ's heralds now to proclaim not what He is able to do merely, but what He has done. Having bowed His head in death as an atonement for sin, He is righteously able "to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bound" Luke 4: 18). None need remain under the galling yoke of Satan for a single hour; one simple appeal to the victorious Lord in heaven's glory sets the soul at large for ever. "If Thou canst" said the Saviour to the parent; "all things are possible to him that believeth" (R.V.). Here we have the secret of blessing and deliverance at all times. It is not human effort, whether resolutions, prayers, or religiousness, but simple faith in the Son of God. The Gospel was intended to open men's eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance amongst all who are sanctified by faith in Christ (Acts 26: 18).

With tears the father exclaimed: "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." At once the blessing came, and the child was set free for ever. Each of the Synoptists records this touching incident Mark, as usual, with greatest fullness of detail.

The Tribute Money.

It was quite natural that the Capernaum collector should challenge Peter in regard to his Master's payment of the half shekel—a tax levied upon all males in Israel for the upkeep of the temple (Matt. 17: 24-27). In His eyes He was only an itinerant preacher, perhaps a prophet, and therefore liable for the impost as all others. But Peter erred egregiously in answering the inquiry in the affirmative. Only a little while before he had confessed Him as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," and had received the Saviour's benediction for it (Matt. 16: 16-17); now he acknowledges His liability for a petty tax as though He were a mere son of Jacob. When he entered the house, the Lord anticipated what he had to say, showing thus His perfect omniscience. "What thinkest thou, Simon, Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own sons or of strangers?" To this the blundering apostle returned the only answer that was possible — "of strangers." Jesus saith unto him: "then are the sons free."

A simple statement, yet how full! Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of Him Who dwelt in the temple. From Him the great Sovereign of the universe never could or would demand anything. But observe the Plural — "sons." He put Peter alongside of Him- self as sharing His position and relationship. "The grace of this is astounding. Yet Scripture is most explicit in its address to every Christian: "Thou art no longer a servant, but a son...Ye are all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3: 26; Gal. 4: 7). We owe this to the Saviour's atoning blood, which has put away all our sins, and furnished God with a righteous ground for the display of all His love and grace. The blood of Christ entitles every believer to share His relationship of Son to the Father, and to be with Him in His heavenly glory for ever.

But these wonders are not yet acknowledged by the world. Neither Christ nor Christians are yet recognised in their true position of exaltation as sons to the Father. Consequently the tax must be paid without demur. Neither clamour, nor resistance- passive or otherwise could proceed from the meek and lowly One. Had the half shekel been required at census time as atonement-money (Ex. 30: 11-16) the case would have presented grave difficulties; but the collection was of a different nature, a mere charge for the maintenance of the temple (2 Chron. 24: 6). Mark the tender consideration of our Lord; Notwithstanding, lest we should stumble them' He would rather pay any figure, however unjust or objectionable, than endanger the testimony of God by provoking invidious comments from the unregenerate. How little has His example been heeded by Christians when smarting under a sense of wrong!

Small though the amount was — a coin — the Saviour did not possess it. Creation must therefore supply it at His command. "Go thou to the sea, cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for Me and thee." Everything and everyone — wind, waves, fishes, demons, etc. discerned Who He was but poor benighted man. Painful thought! The most favoured of all God's creatures, the blindest of all through sin! Yet His infinite grace picks up multitudes of the wretched sons of men, and puts them in the company of His own beloved Son, so that He can link them with Himself and say, "Me and thee."

Blind Bartimaeus.

The Saviour was journeying to Jerusalem for the last time. In less than a week all the sorrow of earth were over for Him. Death, with its agony and shame, was behind Him, and His body lay in the tomb. But though His sensitive spirit felt the weight of all that was impending, nothing was permitted to stay His beneficent hand. Human misery and need aroused all the tenderness of His heart.

He was just passing out of Jericho, after being a guest at the house of Zacchaeus (Luke 19). The fact that this city had lain under a special curse for ages was no barrier with Him; divine grace in Him rose supreme over everything. Had it not been so, He would never have visited our earth, so long under God's displeasure because of sin. A blind beggar, hearing the tramp of a crowd, and inquiring what it meant, learned that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. Mark tells us his name was Bartimaeus; Matthew lets us know that he had a companion, this being the third instance in which the first Gospel notes two sufferers where the other Gospels speak only of one.

Bartimaeus cried out lustily: 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.' He received no rebuff from the Saviour for addressing Him by this title. In using it he was as right as the Syro-Phoenician woman was wrong. As born of the stock of Israel, he was entitled to look for a king of David's line who should open the eyes of the blind, unstop the ears of the deaf, make the lame leap as a hart, and teach

the tongue of the dumb to sing (Isa. 35: 5-6). Bystanders sought to silence him, but to no purpose. "He cried out the more a great deal, Thou Son Of David, have mercy on me" (Mark 10: 48). Had he missed this opportunity, he would never have had another, for the Lord never visited Jericho again.

His cry reached the Saviour's ears. Learning that he might approach, the blind man "cast away his garment, sprang up, and came to Jesus" (R.V.). This poor man reads us many lessons. There is a garment of self-righteousness which multitudes are hugging today to their soul's harm. Oh, that they would cast it from them, and as sinners seek the Saviour's feet! (Rom. 10: 3). Many among us would also do well to imitate Bartimaeus' earnestness in appealing for the blessing, and the alacrity with which he hastened to receive it. One word from Jesus sufficed for his healing: "Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. "Not only he, but also those who beheld the miracle, burst forth in praise to God (Luke 18: 43) The Lord did not bid him be silent about his healing as when He healed two blind men some time before (Matt. 9: 30). He was about to present Himself publicly In Jerusalem as Israel's long expected King, and it was well that a testimony should be rendered at this juncture to His person and His power. But the clearest testimony avails nothing for men willingly blinded by Satan; hence no crown awaited Him In Jerusalem but a crown of thorns; no throne of glory was in preparation for Him, but instead a cross of shame. But this, in the wonderful ways of God, has secured our salvation from eternal woe.

The Accursed Fig Tree.

Every miracle performed by the Son of God on an earth was an act of goodness and mercy, with the single exception of the cursing of the fig-tree. This occurred during His last week of sorrow. His ministry during that week was exercised in Jerusalem, but each evening He went out of the city to lodge in Bethany, preferring the simple reality of Lazarus and his sisters, to the dead religious formalism of which Jerusalem was full.

One morning, as He traversed the road between Bethany and the metropolis, feeling hungry, He paused at a wayside fig-tree intending to pluck some fruit. He found Leaves in abundance, but of figs there was no sign. The gathering time not having come, the branches should have been laden (Mark 11: 12, 13). He forthwith pronounced His anathema upon it: "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever." The tree presently withered up from the roots (Matt. 21: 19).

The whole proceeding was so unique, and its severity so unusual for One so full of grace as the Lord Jesus, that we are arrested by it, and constrained to enquire into its significance. Some time before He had likened the Jewish people to a figtree planted in a vineyard (Luke 13: 6). This furnishes us with the key to this remarkable incident. He was Himself Jehovah who had shown favour and care to Israel for ages, and Who was entitled therefore to look for some return. Alas! Israel's history had been one of sin and rebellion from the beginning. Under every divine test they had produced nothing but thorns and briars. Now He had come from heaven in person to put them to the supreme test of His own presence. This was soon to end in blood. The air was full of conspiracy against Him; and in a few days, as He perfectly well knew, He would be lying dead in the tomb. His cursing of the fig-tree was therefore a symbolic action; for the tree represented Israel under the old covenant, soon to be utterly rejected as hopelessly unfruitful for God. When God does gather fruit from that people, it will be from a new generation under the new covenant of grace in the Millennial kingdom.

The cursing of the fig-tree has a voice for men in Christendom as well as for men in Israel. Israel's history, rightly viewed, is a mirror in which men everywhere may see their own reflection. The

Christendom of today is as unreal and as unfruitful for God as the Israel of the past. Every thoughtful observer will admit that we are face to face with a profitless mass of hollow religious profession. In no sphere is there so much sham as in the religious sphere. Men commemorate with feasting the birth of the Saviour while spurning His salvation; they build costly temples in His name while refusing Him one inch of space in their hearts; they celebrate with pompous ritual His atoning death while despising it for their souls' need. The Judge of guilty Israel will not for ever spare far guiltier Christendom. In Rom. 11: 16-22 will be found its righteous doom.

Let us away with all unreality and sham. He who has given His whole heart to us is surely worthy of all that our poor hearts can render in return.

The Demon in the synagogue.

When our Lord first left Nazareth to live at Capernaum He was met with an extraordinary experience in that little port. According to His custom, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day His disciples attending Him. His exposition of the Scriptures was interrupted by a demon-possessed man crying out: "What have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art Thou come to destroy us I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God' (Mark 1: 24). To be confronted in such a place with the power of Satan was surely very remarkable. The Saviour frequently met demoniacs in the outside world, thus being painfully reminded that the world is under Satan as its prince; but that a demon should intrude, as it were, into the very presence of God was extraordinary. The demon knew Him, and did not hesitate to confess Him as the Holy One, a title long before assigned to Him in Ps. 89: 19. But the Lord could no more receive testimony from such a source than Paul later, when publicly witnessed to by a Pythoness in the streets of Philippi (Acts 16: 16-18). Between Christ and Satan there can be no affinity, but rather the deepest moral antagonism. Accordingly, in the presence of the congregation, the Lord overthrew the power of the enemy, and set his victim free. The people went home marvelling both at the teaching they had heard and the power they had witnessed.

Is there anything today answering to the demon in the synagogue? Most assuredly, for history is; repeating itself continually. The parable of the mustard-seed comes to mind in this connection. The Lord likened the profession of Christianity to the least of all seeds which developed to such proportions that it provided a lodging-place for the birds of the air. Now seeing that in the course of the same exposition He used the birds as symbols of the emissaries of Satan (Matt. 13: 4,19, 31-32), what have we here but a forecast of Christian profession losing its original humble character, and becoming a great and showy 'system, with room beneath its shelter for the very, enemies of Christ and the Gospel. How sadly this has been verified must be patent to every thoughtful observer. How comes it that in buildings erected for the preaching of the Word of God men are heard discrediting the Inspiration of the Scriptures, repudiating the possibility of miracles, doubting the virgin birth of Christ, speaking disrespectfully of His atoning blood, and spiritualising away the momentous fact of His resurrection. Comes this kind of thing from the Spirit of Truth, or from some other spirit? Let us not deceive ourselves. There is a working of Satan in Christendom today as real and as malignant as in Israel of old. The manner of its manifestation has changed, but that is all. In a polished age men are apt to use mild terms for grave offences, and thus obscure their real nature and character. It is infinitely wiser and safer to set things in their true light, however hideous they may appear.

None can put down the power of Satan but Him Who cast out the demon in the synagogue of Capernaum. This He will accomplish effectually when He comes out of heaven in power and majesty. Meanwhile, those who fear God are enjoined to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of

darkness but rather to expose them (Eph. 5: 11).

Ephphatha.

Mark tells us that after His special journey into the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon for the healing of the Syro-Phoenician, the Saviour made a circuit of the Decapolis district. This consisted of ten cities which had been granted special privileges by the Roman conquerors about a century earlier. There, as everywhere else, He found abundant need for the exercise of His divine power and mercy. A man was brought to Him who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech (Mark 7: 31-37); a humiliating picture of every man's moral and spiritual condition as the fruit of the fall. God lost man's ear in the garden; ever since that fatal day the disposition of the whole human family has been to listen to anyone rather than to God. Hence the exhortation to the chosen people: "Hear, O Israel" (Deut. 6: 4), and the divine lamentation: "Oh, that My people had hearkened unto Me" (Ps. 81: 13). Hence, too, the appeal to us all: "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb. 3: 7). The tongue of the unregenerate man is as estranged from God as the ear; for none can deny that the most eloquent conversationalist betrays an impediment in his speech as soon as the things of God and Christ are introduced.

The Saviour took the sufferer aside from the crowd. It is good to be alone in the divine presence. The busy hum of the world is not conducive to spiritual reflection. The great destroyer of souls would rather keep men in a continuous whirl of business and pleasure than see them sitting down quietly in meditation before God. But it is in the hush of the divine presence that we learn our sin and guilt, and our deep need of sovereign grace. There, apart from the thoughtless, clamorous crowd, we see things in their true light, and our souls find eternal blessing.

The Saviour touched first the ears of the afflicted one. and then his tongue. This order is significant. In the spiritual realm the ear must be opened to receive divine instruction ere the tongue is able to speak forth God's praise. "We believe, and therefore speak" (2 Cor. 4: 13). "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10: 17). He who has received by way of the ear the Gospel of Christ into His heart will delight to speak of the marvels of God's grace to all around.

As He touched the man the Lord looked up to heaven, and sighed, saying "Ephphatha," that is "Be opened." The burden of the world's sin, and the many miseries attendant upon it, oppressed His gracious spirit. He recalled the day when, ages before, He pronounced His whole creative work "very good" (Gen. 1: 31), and He groaned as He considered all the havoc that Satan and man had caused through sin. It was this that brought Him from above. But He had come, not to heal physical diseases only, but to make atonement for sin by His blood, in order that all who believe might be delivered once and for ever from the guilt and thralldom of sin, and be reconciled to God in peace and blessing.

The astonished multitudes who beheld the present miracle exclaimed, "He hath done all things well." With what fullness of meaning may this be said when the new heavens and the new earth appear, peopled by countless myriads of the blest, saved from sin, suffering, and death as the fruit of His priceless sacrifice.

Men as Trees Walking

Our Lord on one occasion performed a miracle in two parts. The scene was Bethsaida: its record is found in Mark 8: 22-26) the other Evangelists being silent as to it. A blind man being brought to

Him, the Saviour led him out of the town, and spat upon his eyes; then, putting His hands upon him, He enquired if he saw anything. The man replied: "I see men as trees, walking." The great Healer touched him a second time, after which he looked up, and saw all things clearly. He was then dismissed to his home.

The line pursued by our Lord in this instance was very singular, and its lessons are of an unusual kind. The partial sight of this man represented the spiritual condition of the disciples while the Saviour was with them. They but dimly perceived the true character of His gracious mission. They sincerely believed that He was the long-expected Messiah, Who should sit upon David's throne; but that He must needs suffer, and be made an offering for sin had no place whatever in their thoughts. They clearly understood that such a chapter as Ps. 72, with its kingdom-glories, had reference to Him, but it never dawned upon them that Isa. 53, with its predictions of suffering and shame, must also find its fulfilment in Him. His post-resurrection conversation on the way to Emmaus cleared away many difficulties for those to whom it was addressed: "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory" (Luke 24:26). His visit to Jerusalem later in the same day dissipated the perplexities of others. "He opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them: 'Thus it is written, and thus it behoved the Christ to suffer; and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations' (Luke 24: 45-47). Hence forward these men were mighty witnesses to a crucified Saviour, while looking and waiting for His return from heaven as a glorious King.

Many true-hearted believers today are as imperfect in their spiritual vision as the disciples of long ago. So to speak, they "see men as trees walking." Very few things are clear to them. For example, many fear that though they are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus they may ultimately find themselves rejected, failing to understand that there is no condemnation for those whom divine grace has identified with Christ. They are apprehensive that the gift of the Holy Spirit may be withdrawn from them, not perceiving that this priceless bestowal is due to the Saviour's blood, which makes it secure for ever. They imagine that every time the Christian fails he needs a fresh cleansing in the atoning blood, their faith not having grasped that the Christian is judicially clean for ever, needing nothing for daily failures but the water of the Word of God. They are fearful concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus lest they should then be left behind, not having learned that our translation to glory is the fruit of sovereign grace alone, which can never fail. Oh, that all these would go aside once more with the Saviour and get another touch from His blessed hand, as the poor man of Bethsaida. They would then read spiritual things in God's own light, and their joy would be full for ever.

The Draught of Fishes.

It was a notable day in the history of Simon Peter when the Saviour requested the loan of his boat on the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5: 1-11). It was not his first acquaintance with Him. Some time before he had been introduced to the Lord by his brother Andrew, and it had resulted in a heart-attachment to Him which was abiding and eternal (John 1: 40-42) But, like many another truly converted soul, Simon had much to learn concerning the evil of his own heart and the remarkable incident upon the lake was an immense blessing to him in this direction.

It happened on this wise. The Saviour was being hard pressed by multitudes eager to hear the Word of God. Being by the lake shore, and observing two boats near by, He asked for the use of one that He might teach the people therefrom. Simon, who was washing his nets with his partners, responded with alacrity, and the preaching was continued under these exceptional conditions. When the

speaking was finished, the Lord bade Simon launch out into the deep, and let down his net for a draught. Though he had toiled all night in vain, he obeyed the injunction, with the result that so great a multitude of fishes was hauled up that the net brake. The second boat was requisitioned, and both were so heavily freighted that they began to sink.

Never had Simon and his companions known such an experience. In Simon's own case, it yielded deep spiritual blessing. It so brought home to him the reality of having to do with God that all the evil of his heart became naked and bare before him, and he fell at Jesus' knees, saying: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Such was his soul distress that he was completely oblivious to the dangerous condition of the sinking boat. This was not his conversion. He had been converted at his first meeting with the Saviour; this was simply a deepening of the work of God in his soul. Job had such an experience (Job 42: 6); Isaiah also (Isa. 6: 5); and Paul. The latter was reduced to confess: "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7: 18). "No confidence in the flesh" was henceforth one of the mottoes of his life (Phil. 3: 3). When a man reaches this point he learns that nothing counts with God but Christ, and his whole confidence becomes centred in Him Who died and rose again. Happy position in which to stand; involving, as it does, complete deliverance from one's old self with all its pretensions and claims.

The poor conscience-stricken fisherman was soon graciously encouraged by the Lord. "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Accordingly Simon and his partners abandoned their boats and nets for ever, and followed the Saviour in His mission of love to the souls of men. Singularly, Luke omits all mention of Andrew in his narrative, while he alone tells us of the special work in the conscience of his brother. Catching men by means of the Gospel became the happy occupation of Simon and Andrew, James and John from that moment. An instance of fishing with the net is given in Acts 2, when three thousand converts were safely landed; and an instance of fishing with the hook is recorded in Acts 8, when an individual soul was savingly blessed by a desert road.

The Widow's Son at Nain.

It was surely not unreasonable when Paul demanded of King Agrippa: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead (Acts 26: 8). Let it once be admitted that there is a God Who is supreme in the universe. and it is easy to believe in resurrection, however stupendous the miracle may be. He who created man from dust is surely able to call him forth again from the domain of death, if it please Him so to do.

But God alone can perform such a marvel. When at different times Elijah, Peter and Paul raised persons from the dead, they were manifestly wielding power not their own, and the miracles were granted in response to their prayer of faith. But He who was greater than they could arrest a funeral procession with His majestic "I say unto thee, Arise," and death immediately yielded up its prey. Well might the people say that He spake as one having authority, and that never man spake as He.

We have before our minds just now His action at the gate of Nain (Luke 7: 11-17). As He approached the place, accompanied by His disciples, and followed by the usual multitude, a dead man was being carried out to burial. He was the only son of a widowed mother. So sorrowful a spectacle could not fail to appeal to the tender heart of the Saviour. All His sympathy went out forthwith to the desolate mourner. But in Him sympathy was ever combined with power. Hence He not only said to the mother, "Weep not"; He also said to her son, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." "And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother."

We recall His claims as recorded in John 5: 21-29. He affirmed that as the Father raises up the dead and quickens them, even so the Son quickens whom He will. He further asserted that the Father has committed all judgement unto Him, that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. Quickener of the dead, and Judge. Tremendous claims assuredly, with which none dare trifle. If Jesus of Nazareth be not all this, let us never more breathe His name. He who claims such prerogatives falsely, must be branded as the worst and most dangerous of men. But if He is indeed both Quickener and Judge, let us hasten to His feet, and acknowledge His title with reverence and godly fear. He quickens the spiritually dead in this Gospel day by means of the written Word (John 5: 24-25). and all who are thus quickened become possessors of eternal life; when the Gospel day is over He will quicken men's bodies also, calling forth those who have done good unto the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil unto the resurrection of judgement (John 5: 28-29). Yet this does not imply that all will be raised simultaneously; Rev. 20: 5, 6 makes it perfectly clear that a thousand years will elapse between the resurrection of the blessed and the resurrection of the lost.

The greatest marvel of all is that One possessed of such prerogatives should have stooped to death Himself for the blessing and salvation of men ruined and undone. It becomes us to bow our heads adoringly in the presence of His own declaration: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. John 3: 14-15.

God or Beelzebub.

"He was casting out a demon, and it was dumb" (Luke 11: 14). "Blind and dumb," adds Matthew 12: 22). A most merciful deliverance assuredly, for which every observer should have been profoundly thankful to God. The common people were not altogether unappreciative, for they said: "Is not this the Son of David?" It has frequently happened that the simple ones of the earth have been very true in their perception of the hand of God.

But with the religious leaders it was otherwise. They said: "He casteth out demons by Beelzebub the prince of demons" (Luke 11: 15, R.V.). Matthew says this came from the Pharisees; Mark adds that the scribes were involved in it also (Mark 3: 22). It is a question whether we should condemn the most their spiritual incompetency or their desperate wickedness. If they were really quite unable to distinguish between the hand of God and the hand of Satan they were utterly unfit to be instructors of God's people; If instead they saw God's power and deliberately imputed it to be the operation of hell, because it did not happen to work through official channels, the wickedness of it is almost too awful to contemplate. No evil is worse than religious evil; how much there has been of it let the annals of ecclesiasticism declare.

There have ever been certain recognised channels through which, in men's judgement, divine power and blessing ought to flow. But it is most certain that the blessing of God has reached multitudes of souls apart from official channels altogether. Like Gideon's fleece, ecclesiasticism has been dry while the refreshing dew of God's Spirit has been experienced all around (Judges 6: 40) This, instead of producing heart-searching In those thus divinely passed by, has only too often evoked rancour and blasphemy. It is a settled principle with ecclesiasticism that everything outside of itself is unauthorised and abominable.

The compassionate Saviour stooped to reason with His evil critics. He asked them how Satan could possibly cast out. Satan, and pointed out that a kingdom divided against itself must needs come

to desolation, and that a house divided against itself cannot stand. The true position was this — Satan as the strong one had long kept his captives in peace; now a Stronger had come, with power to overcome him, and divide the spoils. For this let us praise our God. The Stronger than Satan is manifestly the victorious Son of God. He has met the enemy in his last stronghold — death, and has vanquished him, putting away sin the while; there is not a single child of Adam but may be set free from the thralldom of Satan forthwith by appealing to the Saviour's grace. Sin-distressed souls need not concern themselves with the ways and criticism of contentious religionists; the Saviour is their true resource; let them cast themselves on Him.

To His stern rebuke our Lord added these words: "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad" (Luke 11: 23). He was undoubtedly wielding the power of God in grace and blessing to needy men; those who opposed Him were not gatherers but rather scatterers, of God's "beautiful flock" (Jer. 13: 20): Let us tremble lest religious prejudice land us in this terrible position today. Where the hand of God is clearly seen, where the Spirit of grace is really blessing and comforting souls, let us frankly acknowledge it, and without a reserve in our hearts let us praise and magnify our God.

The Bent Woman.

This was a Sabbath-day incident, and is recorded by Luke only (Luke 13: 10-17). Probably on no day in the week was our Lord so closely watched by His adversaries as on the Sabbath, in the hope that they might convict Him of some breach of the law concerning it. How little did they realise, in their unbelief and perverseness, that they were criticising the very One who gave the law from the fiery mount! The sadness of it is heightened by the fact that these were not the ignorant of the land, but the religious leaders of God's chosen people.

The present miracle was performed in a synagogue, most likely in Jerusalem. A woman was there who "was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself." Expressive picture of every man's spiritual condition through sin, unable to look up into the face of his God, and without strength to remedy his evil plight (Ps. 40: 12; Rom. 5: 6). The woman had suffered in her deformity eighteen years. If Scripture numbers are significant, as we believe, eighteen, being the treble of six, is suggestive of the full manifestation of evil. Compare Rev. 13: 18. She thus becomes the type of the worst of sinners. Her condition appealed at once to the sensitive spirit of the Saviour. He called her to Him, and said: "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

Had there been a spark of spiritual discernment in the ruler of the synagogue, he would have at once called for Ps. 103. From every tongue present there might well have sounded forth the refrain: Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases" Alas for the ruler! No such sentiments occurred to his spiritually darkened mind. Instead, he blazed forth with indignation, saying to the people: "There are six days in which men ought to work; in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath-day. "This outburst suggests a serious question. When God prescribed the Sabbath for man, forbidding him to work therein, did He thereby intend to bind His own hands, and make it improper for Himself to work on that day, even to perform a deed of mercy? The very suggestion is profanity itself. So good is He, so compassionate in His love, nothing can stay Him in His ministry of Grace to poor ruined man. The woman just healed was "a daughter of Abraham," i.e. she was possessed of Abraham's faith. Must faith wait for blessing because it is the

Sabbath-day. Impossible, seeing that faith, not works or ceremonial observances is the standing principle of blessing with God. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness...Therefore it is of faith, that it might be of grace" (Rom. 4: 5, 16). Grace gives the blessing, and faith receives it. All the work necessary for man's eternal good was wrought by the Son of God, when He died upon the cross of Calvary.

The Saviour did not hesitate to expose the hypocrisy of His heartless critic. He would loose his ox or his ass and lead it to the water on the Sabbath day, yet would deny God the right to relieve a suffering woman. Truly our God has no more malignant or unreasonable antagonists than those who oppose Him in the name of religion.

The Dropsical Man.

Yet another Sabbath-day incident. The place, not a synagogue, but the dinner-table of one of Israel's chief Ecclesiastics, and he a Pharisee. Luke 14: 1 (who alone reports the case) says 'they watched Him'. Nothing more need be stated concerning the attitude of the host and his friends towards their Guest. They were sitting at table with God manifested in flesh, yet so blind were they that they knew it not.

It was an instructive occasion for those who had ears to hear. The lips of Eternal Truth were freely opened. Things were said that day which should have sent every guest to his closet in humiliation before God. The Saviour spoke of the boundless grace of God, and He spoke also of the hopeless evil of the human heart. The presence of a sufferer — a man afflicted with dropsy — furnished Him with His text. He raised the question of the Sabbath Himself this time. He demanded of the lawyers and Pharisees about Him: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day, or not." Obtaining no response, He healed the poor fellow, and let him go: knowing that they were bitterly censuring Him in their hearts for His deed of mercy, He proceeded thus: "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath-day!" The challenge was unanswerable. Where their own interests were concerned they would not scruple to act promptly, let the day be ever so sacred.

Man-even religious man-thus stands convicted of being utterly out of harmony with God. His boasted fidelity to religious forms is not the fruit of love to God, but simply gratification of his spiritual pride. What can be conceived more offensive than this. If open transgressors produce "wicked works" (Col. 1: 21). religionists produce "dead works" (Heb. 9: 14). and both are equally hateful to Him with whom we have to do. So morally alienated is man from God, that it has to be said to all alike: "Ye must be born anew" John 3: 7).

The Saviour's exposure of the human heart at the Pharisee's dinner-table is painful to read. First. He rebuked the pride of His fellow-guests, as shown in their eager scramble for the chief seats; then He censured the selfishness of the host in that he had invited only those to his table who would be certain to recompense him again (Luke 14: 7-14). .Pride and selfishness in the presence of the self-sacrificing One who had left heaven's glory for Calvary's cross in His love to perishing sinners! A person venturing the remark, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God," He added the parable of the great supper, the sad moral of which, as regards man, is that though God provide something ever so costly and rare, man has no heart for it. The scramblers for the best seats in the Pharisee's house wanted no seat at all where God and His grace were found. "I pray thee have me excused" was their uniform reply to His loving invitation. If God would have guests at His feast, such is the animosity of

the human heart towards Him, even amongst the religious, that He must needs "compel them to come in." Truly, if man's heart be only evil, the heart of God is only good, and that eternally.

The Ten Lepers.

This striking incident happened during our Lord's last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. The record of it is preserved in the third Gospel only (Luke 17: 11-19). Ten lepers met the Saviour at His entrance into a village, and with one accord cried to Him for mercy. The fame of His deeds of power had spread from Dan to Beersheba; hence the readiness with which these victims of disease appealed to Him. Remarkably, one of them was a Samaritan, the rest being Jews. Under ordinary circumstances the nine would have spurned the company of the tenth ("for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans"); but the stress of a common disease had put them all on one level, and they apparently felt it. The greatest leveller of all is sin, of which leprosy is in Scripture the expressive type.. High and low, rich and poor, religious and irreligious, are all in the same position before God in this respect; "there is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3: 23). What matters it that some owe 50 pence and some 500 if all alike have nothing wherewith to pay (Luke 7: 41-42).

In answer to the cry of the lepers the Saviour said: "Go, show yourselves unto the priests." Why did He act thus? Why did He not put out His hand, and touch them, and so give them instantaneous healing, as with the leper of Luke 5: 13? The reason appears to be that He would test them as to their confidence in His word. Their response was perfect. With no change whatever in their condition they turned their steps in the direction of the temple to offer their two birds (Lev. 14: 1-4), being confident that healing would be experienced on the road, as really happened. "As they went they were cleansed." Let these poor fellows read us a lesson today. Confidence in the divine word (for us the Scriptures) is the deepest need of our time. Higher Criticism, and the "opposition of science falsely so-called" are destroying faith in the Word of God. Multitudes are weltering in unbelief, to their deadly peril. Yet blessing for us, as for the ten lepers, is only found in the way of faith; and "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10: 17).

A remarkable thing happened. As soon as the little band became conscious that they were healed. The Samaritan broke away from his companions (who continued their journey towards the temple), and re- turned to Jesus, falling at His feet, and glorifying God with a loud voice. In his eyes sanctuaries, ceremonies, and priests, were the veriest trivialities compared with the Son of God. The nine might occupy themselves with the religious formalities of Jerusalem, but he could only be happy at the Saviour's feet. The Lord commended him for it in the words: "Were there not ten cleansed; but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." If the Lord could so speak in a land where the religious ceremonies of the people were of divine institution, what would He say today when the ceremonies in which men pride themselves are derived partly from Judaism and partly from Paganism, all of them in defiance of the teaching of the New Testament epistles? There is nothing so spiritually barren as ceremonial religion; there is nothing that so satisfies and delights the heart as having contact with the person of the Son of God. To Him, not to religious centres, our allegiance is due; for has He not purged our sins by His blood, and does He not live now on our behalf in the glory above. Let others impoverish themselves with mere religion if they will, but let us find our all in Christ Himself.

Malchus Ear.

"The beloved physician" tells us of a very touching scene in the garden of Gethsemane. It happened on the eve of the Saviour's last woe. The cross was looming before Him with all its anguish and shame. He had just risen from His distressful prayer when a band of armed men approached to apprehend Him. The kiss of the traitor indicated to them the One of Whom they were in search. Yet for such an One there was no peril, save as He chose to yield Himself to the malice of His foes. At the sound of His voice His assailants fell to the ground (John 18: 1-8); and nothing would have been easier for Him than to walk away, had it pleased Him so to do. But having come from above to offer Himself as an atoning sacrifice He meekly submitted Himself to their will.

But those around Him were not of the same spirit. Peter, with his accustomed fire, drew a sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus the servant of the high priest. How unlike the Lord are even the noblest of His followers! In Peter, at that moment, we see fleshly activity when his Master was submissive, and an hour or two later when Jesus was confessing before Pontius Pilate the good confession, Peter was denying Him in the presence of the servants with oaths and curses (1 Tim. 6: 13; Luke 22: 54-62).

Now mark the Saviour's grace. He rebuked His disciple for his unholy zeal, and forthwith touched the ear of the servant and healed him. It is Luke who tells us of this extraordinary display of healing grace, and it is John who records the names of the parties concerned (Luke 22: 51; John 18: 10). Truly, there is no limit to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not only during the days of His ministry, but when the clouds were darkening around Him, He was the willing servant of human misery and need, This is most beautifully shown in His kindness to the dying thief, and in His healing of Malchus' ear.

An open antagonist healed and blessed! Can the annals of human nature show anything like it? Yet it is the very essence of the Gospel that the Saviour should act thus. Hence the words in Col. 1: 21: You who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death. He who penned these words had personally experienced the truth of them. Malchus was barely so pronounced an antagonist of the Son of God as Saul of Tarsus, "who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." It is no marvel that one who had been so divinely favoured - delighted henceforward to proclaim: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1: 12-15). No one in the universe is so able to melt hard hearts as the Lord Jesus, and to transform the most violent adversaries into humble and devoted disciples. All His ways are ways of matchless grace.

Water made Wine

It will be noticed that John in his history of the Saviour pursues a line altogether different from the other evangelists. The reason of this is that while Matthew, Mark, and Luke present the Lord to us in various human characters—as Messiah, Servant, and Son of Man, John sets forth His essential Deity. In the course of his exposition of this marvellous theme. he gives us a set of seven miracles. rightly called in the Revised Version "Signs." Four of them were performed in Galilee and three in Judea.

The first of these signs was wrought in Cana. soon after the Saviour emerged from the retirement

of Nazareth, and before His first visit to Jerusalem as a Prophet. He had been invited with His disciples to a wedding feast, His mother being there also (John 2: 1-11). Unlike His herald, John the Baptist, our Lord was no ascetic (Luke 7: 33-34). He was the most accessible and gracious of men. Marriage is a divine institution; He would signify His respect for it by His presence at its celebration when called. In a world of evil, marriage is an immense moral safeguard for men, and is "honourable in all" (Heb. 13: 4). "Forbidding to marry". is one of the predicted marks of the apostasy (1 Tim. 4: 3). Amongst the notable first preachers of Christianity Paul seems to have been the only unmarried man. Peter and the other apostles took their wives with them on their missionary journeys (1 Cor. 9: 5).

The wine ran out at Cana. Mary drew the Lord's attention to the fact, evidently prompting Him to perform a miracle. It is noteworthy that He immediately rebuked her. Only on two occasions do we find Mary intruding herself into the Lord's matters of service, and on each occasion He set her aside. (Compare Matt. 12: 46-50; John 2: 3-4). Intensely devoted to her though He was as son to mother, He would not suffer a merely natural relationship to influence the course of sacred things. All who reverence the Scriptures will see in these records a warning given beforehand against the superstitious blunder, now widely prevalent, of attributing intercessory and mediatorial powers to Mary.

The feast-chamber at Cana was furnished with waterpots, but even they were empty, sadly suggestive of the emptiness of all earthly joy and delight. At the Saviour's word the pots were filled with water, which became instantly transformed into wine of such excellent quality as to draw forth high praise from the master of the feast. "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now." What Christ gives is necessarily superior to anything this world can afford. We are hereby reminded in a typical way of the pure joy with which even earth will be filled in the day of Christ's Kingdom. When He who now sits upon the Father's throne is established upon His own throne in Zion, all earth's woes will be brought to an end. He will fill the whole scene with peace and blessing.

Meanwhile the wine is suggestive of the profound truth that all blessing for men, whether now or in "the world to come" is founded upon redeeming blood. For the Saviour ere He went on high appointed a cup of wine as the abiding memorial of His own most precious blood (Matt. 26: 27).

The Courtiers Son.

The Lord was again in Galilee, having returned from Jerusalem through Samaria. During His stay in the metropolis He had expounded the way of life to Nicodemus, and on His journey homeward He had ministered eternal satisfaction and joy to the woman by the well of Sychar. The latter incident was followed by two days of happy labour amongst Samaritans deeply eager to hear His word.

He was once more in Cana. A nobleman, resident in Capernaum, appealed to Him to visit that port and heal his son, who was now at the point of death (John 4: 46-54). The story is interesting in all its parts, for the present and future history of Israel may be read therein. The man was a courtier, or 'King's officer' (R.V. margin); i.e. he was though a Jew, attached to the court of Herod, the alien ruler of the northern districts of Israel. Expressive picture of the false position in which the elect nation has long stood. Having proved false to its unique calling in separation from all other peoples, God has abandoned the nation to the fruit of its ways, with the result that Israel has been for ages subservient to Gentile masters. Like the courtier's son, Israel has fallen under the power of death, so that nationally the people are likened in Ezek. 37, to a valley full of dry bones, no more to live until the day of the Saviour's presence here in power. In answer to His suppliant, the Lord replied: "Except ye see signs and

wonders ye will not believe." In Israel generally this was only too true (1 Cor. 1: 22), while with Samaritans and Gentiles His word sufficed. With fervour the father besought Him: 'Sir, come down, ere my child die." His faith was far below that of the Roman centurion under similar circumstances. He urged the Saviour not to come, but to speak the healing word where He was. being persuaded that nothing more was required (Matt. 8: 8). The Jewish courtier must be taught his lesson; accordingly he was dismissed with the words: "Go thy way, thy son liveth." He believed the Saviour; for his faith, though feeble, was real. He therefore turned his steps homeward, soon meeting servants who had been sent out from Capernaum with the happy intelligence that his son was well. Upon enquiry he learned that the fever left him at the very hour of the Saviour's utterance in Cana. From that moment his whole household became believers in the Messianic title of Jesus of Nazareth.

Faith in the word of the absent Christ is the great need of the present time. No longer is His voice heard speaking on earth, but He speaks from heaven in the sacred Scriptures. Therein He tells us of the infinite love of God, of the costly sacrifice of Calvary, and of pardon, justification and eternal life, the blessed portion of all who trust in Him. If the divine voice is not to be heard in the Scriptures then is heaven absolutely silent, and we are left to blindly grope our way down towards destruction. He who imagines that the Creator has thus abandoned His creatures, plagues his own heart with unreasonable thoughts concerning Him Who is both infinitely wise and infinitely good.

The Pool of Bethesda.

"What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son". No one need misunderstand these words of the apostle, transcribed from Rom. 8: 3. They declare unequivocally the powerlessness of the law to help ruined man, and the supreme necessity for the mission of the Son of God. These principles are strikingly exemplified in the case of the infirm man who was healed by the Saviour at the pool of Bethesda (John 5).

The porches of the pool were invariably crowded with sick folk, for it appears that from time to time an angel troubled its waters.. which then gave healing to the first person that stepped in. This, while a merciful interposition on the part of God, and beneficial to those possessed of some strength, was manifestly of no avail whatever for persons absolutely helpless. The pool is thus remarkably typical of the law, which promises life and righteousness to those who keep it in all its parts, but which has nothing but condemnation and death for those who fail to keep it (Gal. 3: 10-12). Now, seeing that man is utterly evil in root and branch, and so "without strength," it is manifest that the law can never yield him blessing. Scripture says truly "the law is the strength of sin" and "the law worketh wrath" 1 Cor. 15: 56; Rom. 4: 15).

The Saviour observed a man at Bethesda who had been afflicted thirty-eight years! just the period of Israel's unnecessary wandering in the wilderness as the fruit of putting themselves under law (Deut. 2: 14). Hoping against hope, the poor fellow had long watched the pool having no thought in his mind that healing could ever come to him by any other means. Sadly like the multitude in Christendom today. whose only thought concerning salvation is. that it. must be obtained by human effort, if it is to be obtained at all. And this after the full revelation of God's grace in Christ!

To the Saviour's enquiry, "Wilt thou be made whole" the impotent man replied: "Sir, I have no man. when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but, while I am coming, another steppeth down before me." A truly extraordinary reply, seeing that the pool was not mentioned in the question. He must now learn that what the pool could never accomplish for such as he, the Son of God could

accomplish instantly by His word. At the command of Omnipotence, "Rise, take up thy bed and walk," he arose, took up his bed, and departed to his house. In like manner all the need of the soul is now met by the Saviour's word, apart from works of any kind whatsoever. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but is passed from death unto life" (John 5: 24). His atoning death and triumphant resurrection explain how He is able to offer such simple terms to the ruined children of men.

Had heart and conscience been lively in Israel, there would have been national humiliation before God concerning Bethesda's suffering throng. Such was the special character of Israel's calling that suffering and disease would have been unknown amongst them had they continued faithful to Jehovah (Deut. 28). But to everything divine the people, and especially their religious leaders, were utterly insensible. Instead of appreciating the Saviour's goodness they persecuted Him for healing on the Sabbath day. Such is religion without God.

Blind from Birth.

The Saviour had just delivered Himself from the malice of His enemies, who took up stones to cast at Him because He declared Himself the "I am." As He passed by, He noticed a man who had been blind from birth (John 9). The disciples enquired whose sin was responsible for this affliction — the man's, or his parents'? They were as narrow-minded as Job's three friends, who regarded suffering as a special mark of divine displeasure, having no other thought as to it. The Saviour pointed out a higher purpose. — "that the works of God should be manifest in him." The man's misery furnished occasion for the display of divine power and goodness.

He forthwith proceeded to heal him, adopting on this occasion methods altogether unique. He spat on the ground, made clay of the spittle, put it as ointment upon his eyes, and then bade him wash in the pool of Siloam, "which is by interpretation, 'Sent.'" Healing resulted immediately. But what is there for us in this extraordinary record. The clay symbolises our Lord's lowly humanity; the water is an emblem of the Holy Spirit (John 7: 37-39). Thus when a man apprehends by the Spirit's and the momentous fact that the mighty God became human for his salvation, and that He who walked here abased was indeed the 'Sent' One of the Father, his spiritual blindness is dispelled for ever. He forthwith begins to see, and everything becomes viewed in its true light. The Gospel is designed to open men's eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God (Acts 26: 18). The Gospel is not a mere system of doctrines, nor is it simply a moral code; it is God's testimony to men concerning His beloved Son-God and man in one person, once the suffering Surety, but now glorified in the highest heaven.

The healed man was soon challenged by his neighbours as to his recovered sight. He could only reply that "a man called Jesus" had thus blessed him. The religious leaders then took up the matter, and soon manifested their bitter animus against the gracious Healer. Proofs of His power were not wanting, but they were in no humour to acknowledge His divine mission, let the proofs be ever so many. The parents parried their enquiries, dreading excommunication, the usual resort of prejudiced ecclesiastics when Scripture and reason alike fail them. In their examination of the man himself, the Pharisees affected to honour Moses, and even God also, but both at the expense of the Lord Jesus, Whose dishonour was their undeviating aim. The man's simplicity irritated them. His expression of surprise that so great a wonder should be wrought in the land, and the professed exponents of God's truth unable to decide from whence the power came; and his guileless reasoning that his Healer must at least be a worshipper of God and a doer of His will galled them beyond endurance. Accordingly they cast him

out, saying in their offended pride: "Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?"

They could not have conferred upon the poor fellow a greater boon, little as they intended it. The cast-out sheep was soon found by the Good Shepherd, despised and rejected as himself. When his Deliverer revealed Himself to him as the Son of God he fell at His feet adoringly saying, "Lord, I believe." Religion is as hostile to the Son of God now as in the days of His humiliation; but why need we concern ourselves with its moral and spiritual blindness when there is sufficiency in the Saviour outside of it all to satisfy the need of every longing soul?

The Raising of Lazarus.

Bethany was ever a sweet spot to the self-emptied Son of God. It was one of the few places on earth where He was loved. and where His wounded spirit found rest. Lazarus and his sisters constituted a delightful home circle. They loved each other, and they were one in their faith in the despised and rejected Messiah. Sickness invaded their home. for the wisdom of divine love does not always shield its objects from this visitation. Lazarus was laid low, to the deep distress of his devoted sisters (John 11). The Lord was at that moment in retreat beyond Jordan. There the appeal reached Him: "Lord, behold he whom Thou lovest is sick." The sisters did not definitely ask Him to come to their aid. assuming apparently that the news would bring Him without delay. He could have healed the sick man from a distance by His word (as in the case of the centurion's servant), but He did not do so. Nor did He hasten to Bethany, but remained yet two days where He was. Were we not persuaded that such an One as He could never err, His conduct in this instance would amaze us. He was walking in the light, and saw perfectly the course He should pursue to the glory of God. Presently He announced to His disciples that Lazarus was dead, and that He was glad for their sakes He was not there, adding. "Nevertheless, let us go to him." Their warning that perhaps martyrdom awaited Him in Judea the Lord passed by without concern.

A stupendous miracle was to be performed. He had already restored two dead persons to life Jairus' daughter, and the son of the widow of Nain. The one was just dead, and the other was on the way to burial. But Lazarus had been buried four days when the Saviour reached Bethany, and his body was already advanced in corruption. Martha met Him with the remark that if He had been on the spot her brother had not died. When He spoke of resurrection she replied: "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." She did not realise that she was addressing the Resurrection and the Life, Who has power to raise His own sleeping ones when He pleases, and to stay the march of death upon His living ones so that they will never die at all. With all the light given in the New Testament epistles since Martha's day few in Christendom are at this hour beyond her poor notion of a general resurrection at the last day.

Mary followed her sister to the feet of Jesus. Touched by the scene of grief the Saviour groaned and wept — precious proofs of the reality of His holy humanity. Coming to the tomb, the stone was removed at His word spite of Martha's remonstrance. A few words of prayer to the Father were followed by the loud summons: "Lazarus, come forth," and soul and body were united once more. Liberty followed: "Loose him, and let him go." Wonderful outshining of the glory of God in Him whom men were about to crucify! Should not this marvel have convinced His adversaries of the futility of their designs against Him?

He is the Quickener of the dead. At the appointed hour He will raise His own for glory with Himself in the Father's house, and at the epoch of the dissolution of all things He will call forth His

foes for the resurrection of Judgement. Meanwhile He quickens men's souls. Those who heed His voice in the Gospel message pass even now from death unto life, and have the blissful assurance that into judgement they will never come (John 5: 24-29). Life and liberty are the present blissful portion of all who believe in the name of the Only-Begotten Son of God.

The Post-Resurrection Haul.

This was the last miracle wrought by the Saviour before going on high. The cross and the grave were now behind Him. He had been delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification; nothing remained for Him now but to ascend up where He was before. Remarkably, John, the only one of the four evangelists who uses the word "ascend" in connection with our Lord, gives us no account of the ascension itself (John 3: 13; John 6: 62; John 20: 17). Instead, he furnishes us with a series of three incidents which seem expressly designed to show the varied results of the Saviour's atoning work as regards this world. We have first, in the Lord's manifestation of Himself to His disciples on the evening of the resurrection, a picture of the Church of God, now being gathered by the Holy Spirit to Christ as its Centre; then we have, in His showing of Himself to doubting Thomas, an earnest of His future revelation of Himself to long-unbelieving Israel; and, finally, in the remarkable draught of fishes, we may see a picture of the great ingathering from all nations in the Millennial age. God's order for blessing is thus, first, the Church; then Israel; then the world as such. (Let the reader carefully peruse John 20:19 — John 21:14).

The fishing incident happened on this wise. The Lord had appointed His disciples (the men who were soon to evangelise the world) to meet Him in Galilee. On arrival there, instead of waiting for Him, they went fishing at the suggestion of Peter. This was disobedience. Their course is a vivid representation of the present condition of their nation; God's chosen instruments for the world's blessing, yet in obstinate disobedience to the divine will (Rom. 10: 21). A whole night of toil yielded no result to the disciples. Even so will Israel one day confess "We have not wrought any deliverance in the earth" (Isa. 26: 18). Now it has to be said to them: "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you. as it is written" (Rom. 2: 24).

The Saviour came upon the scene as morning dawned. His presence changed everything for the discouraged fishermen. In reply to His enquiry they dismally acknowledged that they had nothing to eat (picture of the present barrenness of disobedient Israel); then at His command they lowered the net on the right side of the boat, and forthwith enclosed 153 great fishes. "And for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken." If the sea, which is here described by its Gentile name (Tiberias, after Tiberius Casar) represents the nations, as we believe, then we have in this haul a striking picture of the great universal ingathering when Israel is once more in relationship with God (Ps. 67). This will not be until the Saviour's feet again stand upon the Mount of Olives.

Every devout soul longs to see the world delivered and blessed. It has been the holy aspiration of the pious in all ages to see the earth filled with the knowledge of God. This yearning has its source in God Himself, and He will not disappoint it. Nevertheless, Christianity is not destined to bring about its happy realisation. The world's blessing hinges upon Israel's blessing. When Israel turns to the Lord and resumes her high place as leader and teacher of the nations, universal good will follow speedily. Meanwhile, salvation is available for all — Jews and Gentiles alike — who put their trust in the Saviour Who died for their sins and rose again.