

Questions of the Hour

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THE VIRGIN-BIRTH OF OUR LORD.

It is surely one of the strongest proofs of the incorrigible evil of fallen humanity, and its inveterate hostility to everything that is of God that so sacred a mystery as the miraculous conception of our Lord should, after so long a time, be seriously challenged. If this unbelief manifested itself in the non-professing world, it would evoke no surprise (what else indeed could be expected there?); but when we find it breaking out within the compass of the professing Church, and that not in obscure individuals, but in those "who seem to be somewhat"; and when, moreover, we find this particular form of unbelief welcomed, it becomes a painful proof that the predicted apostasy is now very near.

This subtle attack upon our Lord's humanity is at the same time an attack upon His Deity. If He really had a human father, then plainly He is man only. All the Scripture passages which speak of His Deity (and their number is legion in both Old and New Testaments) are thus swept overboard at one blow. Never again can we entertain them. Along with the truth of our Lord's Deity goes all hope of salvation for any of us. What creatures however holy, however gifted, could possess the competency to lay down his life in atonement for the sins of others, yea, for the sins of myriads upon myriads of transgressors against God? Further, if our Lord be only a man, He must needs have inherited from His parents the same moral taint as ourselves; in a word, He must have been a sinner even as we. May the God of grace pardon the awful thought!

When Christendom becomes prepared, upon any considerable scale, to throw over the Virgin-birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, union with Judaism and Mohammedanism will be more than possible. A significant change has passed over the minds of Jewish leaders in recent years in regard to our Lord. They have stated repeatedly that they are now prepared to acknowledge Him as a prophet. Mohammedanism has always done this; when Christendom reaches the same point, the apostasy will be complete. But what saith Scripture? "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth

Jesus Christ come in flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God; and this is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" (1 John 4: 2, 3). It is necessary to omit (as we have here done) a few of the superfluous words in the Authorised Version of this passage in order to perceive its true force. It is not a bare acknowledgment of the historical fact of His erstwhile presence on earth that is in question (none could well deny that); it is really a confession of both His Deity and humanity. Who but a divine person could be said to "come in flesh " No angel has the power so to come, and no mere man could enter the world in any other condition. Accordingly; the true test as to whether a man is speaking by the Spirit of God or by the spirit of Antichrist is his confession of our blessed Lord as a divine person come to earth in human flesh.

In such a matter it is useless to appeal to mere reason, and it will not be attempted here. Yet it should not be unreasonable in our eyes that God is able to do as He pleases, even to become Himself incarnate amongst us, if so His heart disposes Him. But we shall simply draw attention to a few Scripture statements concerning this mystery of mysteries counting upon the Spirit of God to use them for the strengthening of faith where it already exists, and for the awakening of faith where at present faith is not.

The very first announcement concerning the Saviour is to the point here. To the serpent in Eden the Lord God said: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel" (Gen. 3: 15) . Three things are here predicted of our Lord: His incarnation; His sufferings, and His victory. But mark the total omission of all reference to the man in this prophecy. The woman, the enemy, and the Deliverer are the only parties mentioned therein. As Revelation unfolded itself, so did the mind of God concerning the coming One. Thus of all Adam's sons Seth was to be His progenitor; later, of Noah's sons, Shem; of Terah's sons, Abram; of Jacob's, Judah; and of Jesse's, David. In due course, the very village was named in which He should be born; and the time of His coming (Mic. 5: 2; Dan. 9: 25). Then in Isa. 7: 14 we read: "Behold; the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel." How this passage is applied by the Spirit of God in Matt. 1: 23 is known to every Bible reader.

It is interesting to observe the difference between the manner of our Lord's annunciation in Matthew and in Luke. In Luke's Gospel we have the angel coming to Mary, informing her that she was the vessel chosen of God for the accomplishment of Isa. 7: 14 in answer to the simple inquiry of her piety how this could be, seeing that she was not in relationship with a man, she was told: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1: 3-5). There are three things here: conception by the power of the divine Spirit; protection of the human vessel and her sacred burden; and the actual birth. Mary's babe was thus not only Son of God as eternally co-existent with the Father, but also by reason of the miraculous circumstances of His coming into the world. Comparing this with Matthew, we have the angel appearing to Joseph — at a somewhat later date. This was for the removal of his righteous scruples when he found his betrothed with child. To him the angel said: "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 1: 20), and to him was committed the responsibility of naming the child. In these two accounts of our Lord's birth is manifest the perfect wisdom of God. seeing that Joseph was in the direct line of succession to David's throne (Mary being descended from a junior branch of the same stock) it was necessary that Jesus should be Joseph's legal heir. This was secured by Joseph's reverent acceptance of the situation as explained to him by the angel. Matthew's Gospel brings this out clearly, while Luke occupies himself simply with the story of the birth without special reference to Joseph and the Davidic title .

Wonder of wonders! Born of a sinful mother (for Mary herself humbly acknowledged her need of a Saviour — Luke 1: 47), yet inheriting no moral taint from her. "A body hast Thou prepared Me; Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. 10: 5-7). In Adam as originally created we see humanity innocent; in ourselves, fallen; in the Son of God; holy. Stainless in nature and in ways, death had no possible demand upon Him. But in His ineffable grace He submitted to the pangs of death that He might thereby make effectual atonement for human sin and guilt. Mere reason may well stagger in the presence of such a mystery as this; but herein is food for faith. "God was manifested in flesh" (1 Tim. 3: 16). Shame on us that so infinite an expression of divine grace should be made a matter of mere idle cavil. Be it the part of every one of us to bow adoringly at His feet, like Thomas of old, exclaiming; "My Lord and my God" (John 20: 28).

OUR LORD'S RESURRECTION.

It is no marvel that Satan should rage against the truth of our Lord's resurrection, and seek to discredit it in every way; for that mighty fact proclaims his greatest defeat, and it is also the earnest and the assurance of his coming final overthrow.

Christianity is built upon the twofold basis of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The apostle makes this abundantly clear in 1 Cor. 15: 3; 4 in his rebuke to certain speculative brethren in Achaia. The death and resurrection of our Lord are not mere "spiritual ideas," but sober historical facts. So well authenticated are these facts that if they may really be doubted we cannot reasonably believe anything outside the range of our immediate observation.

The resurrection and ascension of our Lord were predicted in plain language as early as the days of David, at least a thousand years before the events took place (Ps. 16: 11; 68: 18) . The Lord Himself spoke distinctly of these things while yet He was engaged with His ministry (John 2: 19-21; John 6: 62; Matt. 16: 21; Matt. 17: 9, etc.). His enemies well understood His words, and in view of them besought Pilate after His death to secure the sepulchre until the third day was past (Matt. 27: 62- 66). But their precautions only served to contribute to the absolute certainty of the fact of His resurrection when it was accomplished.

If the resurrection of Christ must really be relegated to the realm of fancies, then faith is at an end and Christianity stands convicted of the greatest fraud that was ever imposed upon the credulity of men. It is the essence and heart of Christianity that the Saviour is alive again from amongst the dead, and enthroned on high, victorious over all the power of death and Satan, with the sin-question settled once for all to the entire satisfaction of the claims of God. If He who entered the portals of death nearly two thousand years ago has indeed never since been seen, upon what has faith to rest?

If the whole story of the resurrection, as given in the Gospels, be read without prejudice it will be perceived that everything connected with that glorious event served to authenticate it to the full. The presence of a Roman guard at the door of the tomb; the unbelief of the disciples at the first news that He had risen (and this recorded by themselves with the utmost simplicity); the lengthy period — forty days — of His sojourn upon earth before He ascended; and the number of persons who saw Him during that period, on one occasion as many as five hundred — all these facts combine to prove that no mistake has been made, and no fraud perpetrated.

Christ, then, is risen. His claims, made when on earth, thus stand divinely vindicated. In contrast with John, He claimed to be the Christ, and was charged before Pilate accordingly (John 1: 20; 10: 24; Luke 23: 2). He claimed also to be the Son of God; and was accused of blasphemy in consequence

(John 19: 7; Luke 22: 70, 71). Resurrection demonstrated Him to be Lord and Christ; and Son of God (Acts 2: 36; Rom. 1: 7).

His character, too, stands vindicated. Was ever servant of God so maligned as He? Crucified as malefactor, He committed Himself in faith to Jehovah as "Thy Holy One" (Acts 2: 27) . The divine answer to this was resurrection on the third day.

More than this. Not only is the resurrection divine testimony to Christ Himself; by raising Him from amongst the dead God has publicly sealed His atoning work. Having brought again from amongst the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, God is able to declare Himself "the God of peace" (Heb. 13: 20). Peace with God; the full assurance that every righteous claim has been settled, is the present happy portion of all who believe the Gospel.

The Lord is risen, and now sits on high as the Church's exalted Head. In His hands are the keys of death and Hades, and at His summons the occupant of every tomb will yet be constrained to respond: first, the redeemed at His coming again; then His foes at that dread moment when heaven and earth shall flee away.

ON MIRACLES.

On miracles in general it will not be necessary to say much. He who, in humble faith, accredits the marvelous facts of our Lord's incarnation and resurrection will have no difficulty in accrediting other wonders recorded in Holy Scripture. He who declines to believe the great basic facts which lie at the very foundation of Christianity; should not ask to be accepted as a Christian at all.

In this matter-of-fact age men are apt to become scornful at the bare suggestion of a miracle. What man cannot do cannot be done. The folly of this attitude should be apparent to the most superficial observer. Upon this principle the charioteer of ancient Rome would have been justified in ridiculing the notion of horseless carriages ever driving through the streets of the Imperial city, and Queen Elizabeth's hardy seamen would have done well to regard as insane anyone who suggested that men would some day navigate the air. Yet now we know that these things, absurdities as they might have appeared in their eyes, are perfectly practicable.

It is sometimes objected that miracles are opposed to natural laws. It would be more correct to say that they have nothing to do with them. Whether performed by God Himself, or by others by His permission, they are sovereign interpositions outside and apart from natural laws altogether. "Laws" suppose a Law-giver. Is it seemly on our part to limit Him, and to affirm what He is able, or ought to do?

The miracles of Scripture have a twofold character. They were, first of all, tokens of God's power.

By means of them it was sought to bring home to the consciences of rebellious men the fact that GOD IS. For this reason many marvelous works were shown in idolatrous Egypt; and for the same reason, in the days of Israel, many mighty deeds were performed in the Kingdom of the ten tribes, and but few in the Kingdom of the two tribes. The latter continued to acknowledge God after Jeroboam led the bulk of their brethren astray in the matter of the golden calves. Scripture miracles were also the expression of God's mercy. The two greatest miracle-workers were Elisha in the Old Testament and the Lord Jesus Christ in the New. The deeds of the son of Shaphat were all of a kindly nature, with one solemn exception; while the works of the Saviour were all, without a single exception,* gracious and merciful in their character. By means of these extraordinary interpositions God was seeking to reach

the hearts and consciences of men.

{*The cursing of the fig tree Matt. 21: 19), not being a miracle wrought upon men, does not invalidate this statement. }

Even miracles must not be accepted as irrefutable proofs of a divine mission on the part of those who perform them. A warning as to this may be found in Deut. 13: 1-5. The possibility is there supposed of one giving a sign or wonder which really came to pass, and which had for its object to divert men from their allegiance to the true God. " Jehovah your God proveth you, to know whether ye love Jehovah your God with all your heart and with all your soul." The magicians of Pharaoh performed marvels in Moses' presence; Rome claims her miracles to-day, and the Antichrist of the future will outstrip all previous pretenders in this direction. But the aim in each of these cases is to draw men, away to that which is apostate and evil.

Miracles have therefore to be tested as to their tendencies ere they are accepted as tokens from God. And what is the true safeguard of the soul? We have it in Paul's charge to the Ephesians in; Acts 20: 32: "I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace; which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." The Word of God abides with us to the end; and it speaks with no uncertain sound to those who have ears to hear and hearts to obey.

THE ORIGIN OF MAN.

It is somewhat late in the day for man to raise questions as to whence he sprang, and yet nothing should surprise us in this period of the world's dotage. Is man a being distinct in nature and character from every other, or is he simply an improvement upon something else? Is he a being divinely created, or is he instead an animal who has struggled through various forms up to his present status; in fulfillment of a mysterious law which no one pretends to completely understand? Such are the questions which are being gravely discussed in the twentieth century. Even in religious circles these questions are considered legitimately debatable.

For those who fear God there is but one way in which to get light upon these matters. So important is it that man should understand what he is and whence he came, that it is only reasonable to suppose that God Himself has somewhere spoken upon the subject. This proposition can only appear unreasonable in the eyes of those who doubt or deny that there is a God at all. Now we hold in our hands a book called "the Bible" which comes to us with the highest possible claims. It demands our attention and obedience as a revelation from our Maker and Judge, and it warns us with the utmost gravity of the consequences of turning a deaf ear to its voice. The first book in the Bible goes by the name of Genesis, which means "beginning." It is thus God's account of the beginning of things — heaven, earth, beasts, man, etc. Seeing the exceeding value and importance of such a book; and seeing too that apart from it we have absolutely no light at all as to the origin of things, it is not surprising that the enemy should labour to discredit Genesis in every possible way. But foolish indeed are they who yield to the fell destroyer in so momentous a particular.

We turn to the book of Genesis therefore in order to learn the truth as to the origin of our race, being fully persuaded that we can learn it in no other way. The conflicting theories of philosophers; ancient and modern; and the egregious folly frequently expressed by them (one generation of philosophers holding up to ridicule the theories of other generations of the same breed) serve to prove that outside of Genesis everything is shifting sand.

Man was created on the sixth day — last of all the works of God. The work of the sixth day (as

that of the third) was in two parts, first cattle etc., then man (Gen. 1: 24-31). In connection with the latter there was divine consultation. "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness." When lower creatures were required it sufficed to say: "Let the waters bring forth . . . let fowl fly," etc., and the creatures required were forthwith alive upon the scene. The grave consultation recorded in Gen. 1: 26 should of itself suggest to the most cursory reader that now a being of a different order from all others was to be brought into the world. Man is thus a distinct and independent creation, having no link whatever with beast; fish, or fowl. "Created" is repeated three times in; v.27; as if the Spirit of God would be beforehand with his rebuke of evolutionist absurdity. Moreover; Adam was the FIRST man. The whole structure of Holy Scripture falls to the ground if there were really men before, or independent of Adam; for the entire volume of inspiration revolves around two men—the fallen first man Adam, and the peerless Second Man, the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 15: 45-47). One man and one stock is God's account of our race and its head. "He hath made of one blood all nations of menwe are the offspring of God" (Acts 17: 26-29). Such was the elementary lesson administered by Paul to the learned heathen in Athens.

The truth of Creation and the theory of Evolution cannot subsist together. There is nothing in common between them. He who holds to the one must needs despise the other. The Evolutionist would do well to ask himself, did the Son of God leave His glory to die for an improved ape? The question has only to be stated to be rejected with holy abhorrence. The Scripture truths of Creation and Redemption both forbid the Evolutionist's foolish dream. Whatever its pretension to superior learning, Evolution is a degrading lie of Satan, designed to hide from man his true relationship to his Maker, and to destroy in him all sense of responsibility, thus ensnaring him into excess of sin to his eternal ruin.

THE SOUL: MORTAL, OR WHAT?

A great question, assuredly, with immense issues (some of us believe eternal issues) dependent upon it. If man is altogether mortal; if his every constituent part is capable of coming to an absolute end then farewell to all responsibility; for judgment is impossible. Man is just an animal, and no more. Accordingly, "let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die" (1 Cor. 15: 32).

Where may we find certainty concerning a matter so important? Not in the reasonings and speculations of men, but in the Word of the living God. Does it, or does it not, teach that there is something in man which does not perish with the body? The question is virtually answered in God's account of the beginning of things. We learn from Gen. 2: 7 that the body of the man was first formed of the dust of the ground, and then, as a separate act, God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. The true life of man is thus not inherent in the outer frame; it is something distinct from mere bodily vitality. Add to this our Lord's words to His disciples in Matt. 10: 28, "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." Supplement this with the Saviour's reference to the long-departed patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; in Luke 20: 38, "He is not a God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto Him." These passages prove conclusively that when earthly conditions are ended there is another sphere, in which the released spirit lives and moves, where no persecuting hand can ever come. And need we remind the reader of the rich man and Lazarus, who are vividly presented to us in Luke 16 in their respective conditions of anguish and bliss when this world had by both been left behind for ever?

Man differs from other created beings in that he is made up of "spirit, and soul, and body" (1 Thess. 5: 23). Angels are spirits only (Heb. 1: 7); animals, etc., consist of soul and body (Gen. 1: 20, see margin). The spirit is the seat of the will and of the intelligence — the mental and moral faculties (1

Cor. 2: 11); the soul is the seat of the affections and desires (1 Sam. 18: 1; Luke 2: 35); the body is the vessel by means of which these express themselves. The word "mortal" is only applied in Scripture to the body; never to either soul or spirit. It is sometimes objected that the term "immortal soul" is not found in Scripture. This is admitted; but what is the force of the objection if that which the orthodox mean by the expression is found there? Moreover, it should be remembered that "immortal" is a negative term; and could only properly be applied to that in man which at some time was "mortal." Since the soul never was mortal; there was no need for the Spirit of God to specifically describe it as immortal.

The Anihilationist will say, in reply to all this, that he believes in "life only in Christ." This is at first sound satisfactory enough, seeing that scripture emphatically declares that "he that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5: 12). But the argument of the Annihilationist is fallacious nevertheless; for it confounds what God has given to all men in the way of nature with what He has given to believers only on the ground of Christ's redemption. "Eternal life" is not mere being, but life in association with the Son of God in His own sphere of blessedness above. This, while open to all, and proclaimed to all in the Gospel, is not entered into by all, being contingent upon faith in the Saviour's name.

The contrasted terms "death" and "life" are used in various senses in Holy Scripture, and it is well to note this carefully. Thus a man may be morally dead — "dead in trespasses and sins" — while full of bodily and mental vitality (Eph. 2: 1); he may be physically dead, and yet be alive unto God (Luke 20: 3, 8); and he may experience the horrors of the second death, the lake of fire, and yet continue in being for ever (Rev. 20: 10-14)

Happy is the man who, instead of contending with his Maker, humbles himself contritely at His feet; and then, as a confessedly guilty sinner, casts himself upon His sovereign mercy revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH MAN?

Certainly there is something radically wrong with man, and that universally. In the political world, the nations are filled with mutual distrust, each suspecting the other of the most evil designs; party leaders, too, abhor and denounce each other as wreckers of the public good. In the commercial sphere, every man considers he must sharpen his wits, or someone will take an unfair advantage of him. In the social circle it is notorious that envy, jealousy, and hypocrisy abound on every side. And if we take the merest glance at the religious realm it is manifest there is much there in doctrine and practice, in both leaders and followers, that is hot as it should be.

No doubt there are those who endeavour to persuade themselves that things are not as bad as we have represented them. So obsessed are they with the notion that the world is improving, and that man is all the time struggling upward that they are tempted to close their eyes to ugly facts, or at least to minimise their importance. But the facts are there; spite of theorists and faddists of every kind. The world is a great open sore, let dreamers speak as they may.

It used to be suggested that if men's temporal circumstances were bettered the moral condition of things would improve. The idea was foolish from the first; and carried its refutation upon its face. If education and comfort can do so much for man; then surely the higher classes should always have been the very mirror of virtue. Yet, as everyone knows, these classes have generally been the most corrupt of all God's creatures. Now there has been a tremendous betterment of the circumstances of all ranks and

conditions during the past century; but with what result? Are men really more truthful more obedient, and more generally disposed to be holy than formerly? Instead of this being so is it not the fact that the world was never more full of refined devilry than at the present hour?

What is wrong with man? Surely God did not make him as we see him? Scripture says, God made man upright (Ecc. 7: 2, 9). An infinitely holy Creator could not have made him otherwise. It was an absolutely perfect being that came forth from the divine workshop at the beginning. Some thing then has happened which has resulted in the moral ruin of our race. What is it? Let the humiliating story of Gen. 3 supply the answer.

In that chapter we have no mere allegory or fairy, tale, but God's soberly indicted account of the entrance of sin into man's world. The tempter has been heeded, the leadership of Satan has been accepted, and this accounts for all the evil of which the universe is full. The following Word of God is clear and emphatic, and withal sweeping in its charge: " By one man sin entered into the world; and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5: 12). Man is thus a fallen being, in open rebellion against his Maker; with the death-sentence lying upon him in consequence.

This is what is wrong with man, and it is clearly a state of things beyond all creature aid. philanthropists and legislators may alleviate some of the details of man's condition, but the root is beyond them. The need is two fold. First, an absolutely new kind of life and nature. The Saviour said to one of the best of men, "Ye must be born again" (John 3: 7). This is imperative for all who would dwell with God, flesh being irremediable. Then, in view of sins committed, there must be an atoning sacrifice. The one perfect offering of the Lord Jesus upon the cross of Calvary has met this deep need for all who believe in His name. "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3: 18). Christ is the only resource both for God and the sinner. He who examines the problem of the world's condition, while ignoring the fall, is on the wrong scent altogether; and he who would benefit his fellows, while leaving out of his scheme the new birth and the precious atoning blood, is pursuing a chimera hopelessly.

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT.

If modern theology may be credited, there is no longer a Hell to be feared, nor is there in man that which must necessarily abide for ever. Satan, Hell; and the soul (as we have always understood these terms) have been practically eliminated from the text books of Christendom. To all this no objection could be offered, if there was any divine authority for such a revolution of thought and idea. Since the voice of God can only be heard in Holy Scripture, we must submit all human propositions, whether ancient or modern, to its arbitrament. He who is willing to take eternal risks on the dubious authority of the word of man should be an object of deep compassion to us all.

To Scripture then we turn. First, as to the word "eternal" (or "everlasting"); what does it mean? 2 Cor. 4: 18 will suffice to answer the question. "The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." The eternal is here contrasted with the temporal. The temporal has an end; the eternal has no end. Now precisely the same word is used in Scripture to denote the divine Being (1 Tim. 1: 17); the blessedness of believers (John 3: 16); and the punishment of unbelievers (Matt. 25: 46). God is eternal; the portion of believers is eternal; and the doom of unbelievers is eternal. All are alike without end.

To this it is sometimes objected that the wicked are to be "destroyed" or "perish," and that these

terms indicate the absolute end of their being. But this is false, as a very little examination of the Scripture usage of these terms will show. "Destroyed" and "perish," it should be noted; are but different translations of one Greek word concerning which the lexicographers tell us that "its fundamental thought is not annihilation, but ruin, loss." Take a few examples. In Luke 5: 37 our Lord says if new wine is put into old bottles (or skins) the wine will burst the bottles, and the bottles will "perish." He did not mean that they would hence forward cease to exist in any form, the point is that as wineskins they would be marred and ruined. So in 1 Cor. 8: 12, where the apostle asks, "Shall the weak brother perish for whom Christ died?" there is no suggestion that the weak one might pass out of being; but simply that, if not considerately treated, such an one might make shipwreck of his Christian testimony.

Even in our daily talk we never think of attaching the thought of annihilation to the words "destroy" or "perish." If I destroy a letter, or an article of furniture, I do not thereby annul their existence in any shape or form, but I so far annul them that they can never again be what they were formerly. The Saviour in Matt. 10: 28 and John 10: 10 expressly distinguishes between "kill" and "destroy." To "kill" is to take life, and in consequence the word is never used in Scripture of the soul. The reader is earnestly recommended to examine these two important passages carefully.

Scripture is explicit — terribly explicit — concerning the impenitent that "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever, and they have no rest day nor night" (Rev. 14: 11) . It insists, moreover, that "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9: 46). It declares, too, as one of the principles of God's moral governments that He will render "unto them that are contentious; and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness — indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish; upon every soul of man that doeth evil" (Rom. 2: 8, 9) . The word "punishment," so often used in Scripture in this Connection, "requires (as another has said) a conscious subject to endure it." It could have no possible meaning as applied to persons who have ceased to be.

No hope of change of condition, nor of extinction of being, was held out to the rich man by "father Abraham" (Luke 16: 24) . The doctrines of universal salvation and of annihilation (so popular in our day) were quite unknown both to the one and the other. The man who had lived wholly for this world was solemnly told that he had received his good things, and that now a great gulf was fixed between himself and the blessed. His humble prayer for even a drop of water could not be granted.

We may well marvel at the madness of those who defy the Almighty to His face. In infinite love He sacrificed His beloved Son in order that men might not perish, but have everlasting life. Now, in the Gospel, He "commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5: 8). Further than this even God could not well go, and those who reject or neglect the preached Saviour can expect nothing else than to reap the eternal consequences of their guilt and folly. In their case, grace being refused, the government of God must take its solemn course. To every man who may be disposed to argue and cavil instead of repent and believe, our counsel would be, "Escape for thy life, look not behind thee . . . lest thou be consumed" (Gen. 19: 17) .

THE DEATH-SLEEP: WHAT IS IT?

Among the many strange doctrines industriously spread abroad in our day is the unconsciousness of the soul after death. In support of this theory every Scripture passage which speaks of men falling asleep is pressed into service. When Scripture is freely quoted, the unreflecting are apt to be carried off their feet, in forgetfulness of the fact that Satan is as capable of using the sacred writings upon them as upon our Lord Himself in the wilderness (Matt. 4: 6). Even the appeal to Scripture has therefore to be tested, in order to ascertain whether it is just and reasonable.

To our subject. Let us glance at the Saviour's case first. In John 20: 17 we hear Him saying: "I am not yet ascended unto My Father." This was after His resurrection, and yet on the day of His death He entered into Paradise, taking with Him the repentant thief according to His gracious promise (Luke 23: 43). How are these things to be reconciled? Simply by recognising the distinction between soul and body. In the disembodied condition both the Saviour and His saved one passed into Paradise at the moment of death; while in body the Saviour did not reach heaven's glory until six weeks later, when He ascended from Olivet in view of His disciples. In Ps. 16: 9, so also, where the Lord Jesus speaks prophetically, the distinction between "My flesh" and "My soul" is clearly indicated.

Take the case of Stephen next. After his martyrdom, devout men carried him to his burial, and made great lamentation over him, yet a little before we hear him saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7: 59; Acts 8: 2). Obviously it was his body that men buried, but while men wept over it below his spirit was already in the blessedness of his Master's presence above.

If the Scriptures be read without prejudice it will be perceived that the term "sleep" is always used in connection with the body, never in connection with the soul. Thus after our Lord's resurrection "many BODIES of the saints which SLEPT arose" (Matt. 27: 52). The expressions so frequently used in the Old Testament that such and such a person "slept with his fathers" and "was buried with his fathers" have reference to the body only; and follow each other in natural sequence. The SLEEPING body was BURIED. The expression "gathered to his people" may possibly have a larger meaning, perhaps indicating that the departed one had joined his forefathers in the unseen world.

What had Paul in view when he said; "to depart and to be with Christ is far better," and "to die is gain"? (Phil. 1: 21-23). Surely he was not yearning for two thousand years of senselessness? How could this be "far better" than the enjoyment of the love of Christ in the midst of labour here? But he himself tells us in 2 Cor. 5: 8 that to be "absent from the body" is to be "present (or, at home) with the Lord." This should suffice to put Paul's blissful experience at this hour beyond all dispute.

Naturally the story of the rich man and Lazarus is hotly assailed by, those who insist upon the sleep of the soul (Luke 16: 19-31). It is regarded as the citadel of the position against which they revolt; and therefore it must be reduced by any means possible. But the waves of unbelief may lash themselves against it ever so furiously; it stands nevertheless. Call the story a parable if you please (though the Saviour does not), there you have men in the world of spirits the reverse of unconscious — fully alive to the sensations of bliss and woe. Moreover, this is not the only Scripture passage which represents men in conversation in the spirit world; Isa. 14: 9-11; Ezek. 32: 21 are as explicit, if not as graphic, as Luke 16: 19- 31. The rich man "died and was buried"; that is, his body. Next we are told: "In hell (Hades) he lifted up his eyes, being in torments"; that is, his soul. The body was in the tomb; but his soul was in Hades. Let us not seek to evade the plain force of this; it is wiser far to take home to our souls the lesson divinely intended. The conclusion of the matter is this, that when the border-line is crossed, the disembodied soul passes forthwith into conscious bliss or woe; though it is admitted that neither saved nor lost reach their final consummation until the resurrection day is over. Let us not fail to remember that that which marks the line of demarcation between saved and lost is faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and in His precious atoning blood.

THE MILLENNIUM: MAN'S WORK, OR GOD'S?

The idea of a Millennium is more or less familiar to the minds of people throughout Christendom. It crops up repeatedly in literature and in politics; sometimes even in trade advertisements. The general conception is a golden age of prosperity, wherein all perplexing problems, whether religious, social, or

political, will find their complete solution. Some, it is true, regard the idea of a Millennium as dreamy and Utopian; others, again, consider that education, legislation, etc., are steadily leading up to the longed-for consummation.

It cannot be denied that Holy Scripture predicts a golden age for this poor tempest-tossed world. In the inspired pages we read that in that era "there shall be abundance of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains," and "the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock" (Ps. 72: 16; Isa. 65: 25). What prosperity! What peace! And such passages could be multiplied indefinitely.

The question before us in this article is, whose hand will bring in this ideal condition of things? Is the Millennium man's work, or God's? Man's hand has certainly caused the ruin that we all deplore, but is man's hand able to repair it? Can the philanthropist with his humanitarian schemes; the scientist with his discoveries, the legislator with his remedial measures, or the diplomatist with his international treaties, even contribute to the final blessed result? Can any or all of these bring us one real step towards the desired haven? Unhesitatingly we answer, NO. God is our only hope. His plans are already formed, and they are clearly quoted in His Word. At His right hand on high sits a Man, who was despised and rejected of men at His first coming to earth, and who is to this hour still emphatically refused by men at large. Under His feet God has pledged Himself to place everything in full subjection (Heb. 2: 8). He has said; moreover "that He shall put down all rule, and all authority and power" (1 Cor. 15: 24). Even before His incarnation, the voice of prophecy addressed Him thus: "Jehovah shall send the rod of Thy strength out of Zion; rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies" (Ps. 110: 2). Towards the accomplishment of these predictions no divine step has yet been taken. The Son of Man still sits in patience at God's right hand, and heaven is quiescent as regards the public affairs of earth. The moment will come when Jehovah will say to His Anointed; "Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession," but He has not said this yet (Ps. 2: 8).

To put it plainly, what will happen is as follows. At a moment when men least expect it, the heavens will be rent asunder, and the Son of Man will appear as with lightning flash (Luke 17: 24). He will be accompanied by all His believing people (previously caught up to Him in the air), and attended by myriad hosts of angels (2 Thess. 1: 7-10). All opposition however considerable from the creature point of view, will melt before Him, and Jehovah will establish Him upon His destined throne in Zion (Ps. 2: 6). Every knee will be constrained to bow to Him, and every tongue will confess His title.

The Millennium is thus the age when the Christ of God will at last receive His rights. This is "man's day," as the margin of 1 Cor. 4: 3 so expressively, tells us; THAT is "the day of the Lord." Now the will of man runs riot in the earth; THEN the will of the Lord will alone be done. "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day" (Isa. 2: 17).

There can thus be no Millennium without Christ. Every scheme which leaves Him out of the account must necessarily be futile. Men's devices can only serve to hasten on the last great clash. Were it possible for man to bind up his own wounds, he would only become more proud and independent of God than ever. It is God's purpose to put the reins into the hands of His Son. Then will the nations get perfect administration; every created thing upon the earth; man and beast alike, will be set free from the thralldom of corruption; and even nature's barren spots will be rejuvenated. But the great King's first steps will be the staining of all human glory, and the dethronement and imprisonment of the usurper Satan. A solemn beginning, which will yield the most happy results while the blissful age rolls on.

THE PERSONALITY OF SATAN.

No Bible student would dream of defending all the grotesque representations of Satan, in poetry, prose and picture, with which Christendom has so long been afflicted. Our inquiry just now is as to the personality of the great adversary, for it is being gravely asserted in some quarters that he is not a living being at all, and that the whole mass of Scripture teaching concerning him must be read allegorically, as applying to a mere principle of evil. Certainly, if Satan is indeed a personality, he must be credited with a masterpiece of ingenuity in so far as he has succeeded in persuading his victims that he has no existence at all! A good preparation, surely, for a great victory!

In this short article we shall deal principally with our Lord's relations with Satan during His sojourn upon earth. First, let us consider the forty days' experience which followed the Saviour's baptism. Both Matthew and Luke state with the gravest details that He was tempted in the wilderness by the devil; Mark also alludes to the fact, but passingly. The very words of the adversary are given, including his quotation of Scripture; and his actions are described in setting our Lord upon the pinnacle of the temple, and in showing Him from a mountain-top all the Kingdoms of the world and the glory of them in a moment of time. If these are not the motions of a PERSON, then we know not how to read a single passage in the book of God.

If the story of the temptation in the wilderness is not sober fact, then surely nothing can be safely credited in the entire Bible. Another thing: if the temptations came not from a person distinct from our Lord Himself, then they must have proceeded; like many of our own sinful promptings, from some evil principle in His own heart! Such an alternative is too horrible for words, for it deprives us at one stroke of our Saviour! The tempted One was in that case only a man like ourselves plagued with a sinful nature, and consequently quite incompetent to make atonement for others. Let us not deceive ourselves. The query as to the personality of Satan is a blow at the Son of God, as indeed is every mischievous doctrine that was ever presented to the minds of men.

To proceed. The Pharisees once wickedly suggested that in the performance of His miracles, the Saviour was operating in collusion with Satan. This He rebutted by showing the absurdity of Satan casting out Satan, and to this He added a parable wherein He likened the foe to a strong man and Himself to a stronger vanquishing him (Matt. 12: 22-30). Moreover, before He entered the garden of Gethsemane on that last night, He said to His disciples: "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me" (John 14: 30). Surely such words can have no other meaning than that the Saviour was meeting a personal foe!

The future of Satan is so graphically described in the Apocalypse that it should suffice of itself to satisfy every honest mind that a person is intended. In Rev. 12 we behold him cast out of the heavens into the earth (in the midst of the Antichristian period); and in Rev. 20. we see him, first shut up in the bottomless pit for 1,000 years; then, the reign of the Son of Man nearing its end, he is released for a little season; next, provoking a revolt against earth's rightful King, he is deprived of his liberty for ever by being cast into the lake of fire. If any reader can see nothing more in such detailed statements than the extirpation of an evil principle; it is to be feared he is beyond the reach of both Scripture and reason. Could an evil principle be "tormented day and night for ever and ever"? (Rev. 20: 10).

It will thus be perceived that the denial of the personality of Satan is no light matter. By it the Son of God stands dishonoured in reference to the period of His temptation; and moreover, by it the Bible is discredited throughout. For none can dispute that from Genesis to Revelation the ways and words of the great adversary are recorded, the opening chapters of the book of Job going the length of reporting verbatim two conversations between him and the Creator. It would be necessary to tear the whole Bible

to pieces in order to get rid of the doctrine of Satan, the great antagonist of both God and man.

THE STORY OF JONAH: NEED. I BELIEVE IT?

The question is more serious than appears at first sight, for it involves everything of a miraculous character that is recorded in the Old and New Testaments. If one miracle may be discredited; we cannot upon any reasonable principle accept any; especially as all come to us upon exactly the same authority. What then becomes of Christianity; which is founded upon miracles of the profoundest character? What greater marvels can be conceived than the Virgin-birth of our Lord, and His glorious resurrection? If these may be safely believed, we need have no difficulty about lesser wonders; but if the momentous facts just named are indeed no facts at all, then woe unto us, for salvation becomes impossible. There is nothing before us but eternal ruin.

Now in regard to Jonah and his sojourn in the fish's belly, we ask, "From whom have we received the story? Who is the author of it?" In reality, everything turns upon this. I could believe the most extraordinary story if it were related to me by one in whom I had full confidence; while I might be dubious concerning the simplest narrative if brought to me by a person upon whose word I could not rely. Who, then, is the author of the story, of Jonah? The answer is really very simple — the Holy Spirit of God is the author of it (whoever the penman), as of all else in Scripture. This statement may evoke a smile on the part of some in these days of widespread unbelief, but it is true, nevertheless. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3: 16). "Men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1: 21). These statements, while perfectly true of the whole canon of Scripture, have special reference to the Old Testament (and, let us remember, Jonah is an Old Testament book). The 39 books which begin with Genesis and end with Malachi were in the hands of the Jewish people in their complete form long before the Son of God entered the world. They never confounded the Apocrypha nor any other writings with the sacred books. The Lord Jesus frequently endorsed the Jewish canon in its threefold division, "the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms" (Luke 24: 44), and has thus made Himself personally responsible for it before all the world.

Further, He most emphatically endorsed the story of Jonah. He spoke of the three days and three nights in the fish's belly as prophetic of His own impending descent into death and the grave; He spoke also of the prophet's preaching, and of the humble repentance of the Ninevites, contrasting the latter sadly with the obduracy of His own hearers (Matt. 12: 39-41). Clearly to the Lord Jesus these things were not allegories, but facts. Historical facts may on occasion be used allegorically, as the apostle used the story of Hagar and Ishmael in Gal. 4: 21-31, but they are nevertheless facts still. It is sometimes asked: "But does it really matter whether we believe the story of Jonah or not? Is there anything spiritual involved in it?" It is not it. too much to say that the whole of Christianity is involved, in the truth or otherwise of that story. The same voice which said when on earth, "Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly," also said, "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). If I may not trust the first of these utterances, how may I trust the second? I would go even further. If His word may not be taken about a simple matter of fact, how can I rely upon it when eternal issues are in the balance? He who doubted the word of his neighbour about a comparatively small matter, and yet trusted it in a matter of vital importance; would be accounted a fool. Let us not deceive ourselves. The real question is not as to Jonah, but as to Christ, and this the arch deceiver knows right well. He who rejects the Jonah story will, unless grace intervene, ultimately reject everything else that is contained within the covers of his Bible. The infidel sneers now to be heard on every hand concerning Jonah are an insult both to the Holy Spirit who indited the story, and to the Son of God who

publicly endorsed it. If these are not sins to be confessed in dust and ashes then I know not any.

THE BIBLE: FROM HEAVEN OR OF MEN?

A great question was agitating the minds of men in Israel when the Son of God came to earth. John the Baptist was in the land, thundering at the consciences of all, and claiming to have a divine mission. The people at large regarded him as a true prophet, and many bowed humbly at his words; but their leaders treated him very differently. They did not openly reject him, denouncing him in terms as not of God, yet they were not at all disposed to acknowledge him. The Saviour's challenge to Israel's spiritual guides was therefore very pertinent: "The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?" (Luke 20: 4). Their reply exposed at once their wickedness and their incompetency.

A similar question is before men's minds to-day. It is not now as to John, but as to the Bible. A book is in our hands, with the highest pretensions to a divine mission. The challenge therefore comes to us: "If it be from heaven, or of men?" If it be from heaven, the enquiry very naturally follows: "Why do ye not then believe it?" (Matt. 21: 25). But if the Bible be of men, let us relegate it to the museum as a curious relic of an ignorant past.

Some will say, "But the Bible states such impossibilities! An ass speaking, walls falling down flat," etc. Pray, from what standpoint do we reason when we pronounce things impossibilities? Is it simply from the standpoint of our present-day experiences? If so, we are manifestly very foolish. Suppose the Bible had spoken of men navigating the air in Noah's day; only fifty years ago one might on this principle, have said it could never have been. But how is it in the year 1910? Because I have never met angels walking the earth, am I wise in saying they never walked here? One has only to bring GOD in, and the greatest marvel becomes simplicity itself. "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19: 26).

One of the greatest of Scripture miracles is prophecy. I do not refer to that which is still unfulfilled (a most edifying study), but to that which has already been accomplished. Whatever date captious critics may choose to assign to the books of the Old Testament, it is undeniable that they were all in the hands of the Jewish people before the Saviour's birth. Yet the prophets testified beforehand so many things concerning Him that a life of Christ could be constructed from their writings. They predicted His birth of a virgin, they named the village in which He should be born, they described His ministry and His miracles, foretold His residence in Galilee, His rejection by both Israel and the Gentiles, His betrayal, death, resurrection, and ascension. Is not all this previous testimony miracle? If not, what is it?

The great effort of today is to exclude God from everything. We may not even regard Him as our Creator now (save in mere terms). We are but developed apes, the fruit of a law which no one understands, and which manifestly has no continuity; for no Scientist pretends that man is still developing towards some higher form of being. God excluded from both His Word and His works! Where are we getting to?

If the Old Testament writers were indeed the ignoramuses they are now proclaimed to be, so childishly simple as to pass on to us gravely as facts what after all are only legends, how comes it that their work still holds its unique place in Christendom? Is it not an insult to twentieth-century enlightenment? If the Bible is of men written with some measure of divine aid (its critics would probably admit this much), why does not the concentrated wisdom of to-day produce for us something distinctly in advance of it? Some measure of divine aid would as surely be granted to sincere writers

now as of old. Why should "the old-fashioned and almost exploded truths of the Bible" (to quote a recent speech by a Bishop, as reported in the daily press) be still taken to the heathen if something better and higher can be provided? We have a right to demand a new work that shall once for all supersede the Bible in our homes and churches — a work in which our hearts may more safely rest than in the old Book. The critics have been destructive long enough; is it not time they became constructive?

The Bible in all its parts undeniably makes tremendous claims for itself. Moses felt so deeply the divine importance of his writings that he delivered them with all solemnity to the care of the priests, with instructions to read them periodically to the people, men, women and children alike (Deut. 31: 9-13) . Moreover, when the time should come for Israel to possess a King, he was "to write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear Jehovah his God," etc. (Deut. 17: 18-20). The sweet psalmist of Israel claimed divine inspiration when he said: "The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, and His word was in my tongue" (2 Sam. 23: 2). The prophets also with one consent spoke with the loftiest authority. Take the first of them: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for Jehovah hath spoken" (Isa. 1: 2). The minor prophets begin with "the word of Jehovah that came unto Hosea." Joel, Jonah, Micah, and Zephaniah open with almost identical words. Amos says five times over in his first chapter, "Thus saith Jehovah." Peter says of the whole of them, "Men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1: 21, R.V.). Paul (in a passage upon the unfair handling of which in the Revised Version I would say much, if space permitted) says: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," i.e., "God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3: 16). Concerning his own writings in particular, he tells us "We speak not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth. . . . If any man think himself to be a prophet; or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 2: 13; 1 Cor. 14: 37).

Such are a few of the claims put forth in the Bible. If they are false claims, then let us reject the Book with the same indignation with which we reject the Koran and the Book of Mormon. No more dangerous book can be conceived than that which comes to us with exalted divine demands which have no real foundation. Any excellent things that may be found in such a book only render it the more to be feared.

We leave the matter at this point. "The Bible is it from heaven, or of men?" If the former as we reverently believe, woe to any man who would persuade us otherwise. He not only jeopardises his own soul, but ours also. Never was there a time when it was more important to turn away from the clamour of men to God Himself. As the apostasy draws on, our only safeguard is the Word of the living God. Men and their opinions and criticisms are as unstable as the shifting sand, but "the Word of the Lord endureth for ever" (1 Peter 1: 25). To this, and to this alone, Paul commended the brethren when his public work was done (Acts 20: 32).