

Simon Peter — Apostle and Living Stone.

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Foreword.

Reading of a biographical character is always interesting, and it is frequently profitable. But the Spirit of God, when recording the life-stories of men, differs from all others in the line that He pursues. Human biographers aim at presenting the commendable side of the characters with which they deal, and they either draw a veil over their ugly features, or touch them lightly or apologetically. But the Spirit of God tells us the whole truth about the men whose lives He is pleased to record. It could not be otherwise. The Bible is the revelation of God Himself all that He is told out there; and the same Book must needs also show us man as he really is. The goodness of God and the badness of man are there presented side by side for our instruction and blessing.

Critics have often found fault with the Bible for its frank exposures of human evil. But its fearlessness in this particular is one of the many proofs of its divine origin, and how thankful should we be to have the whole truth laid before us!

The Spirit of God has laid special emphasis upon the foibles of Simon Peter. We know his vagaries better than those of any of his companions. Indeed, if all the passages which present him to us unfavourably were eliminated from the Bible story, we should know very little of this singular servant of our Lord Jesus. There is doubtless divine design in this. The Spirit knew (though His inspired penmen did not) the use that would be made of Peter's name at a later date, and so has taken pains to show us that the Apostle was not infallible, whatever his pretended successors may claim to be.

On the same principle the Spirit has carefully noted certain occasions when Mary, the mother of our Lord, asked favours of Him, and was refused (John 2: 10; Matt. 12: 48), while omitting altogether the many occasions which must have occurred when He did for her what she desired. So all-wise is our God!

Brought to Jesus.

Perhaps it is not too much to say that of all the apostles of our Lord, Peter has been most prominently before the minds of men in Christendom from the beginning. With many, esteem for this devoted labourer has been suffered to run into the gravest superstition. Positions in the Church, and even in heaven, have been assigned to Peter in the minds of some, from the very idea of which he would have recoiled with trembling. But the career of so eminent a servant of the Lord Jesus cannot but be of the deepest interest to us all. His life story, moreover, contains within itself principles of the greatest possible value.

We begin with his conversion. Doubtless John 1: 40-42 gives us Peter's first meeting with the Son of God. Andrew his brother, with another whose name is not recorded (John, perhaps) had just been brought into blessed contact with the Saviour. Under the spell of the Baptist's ecstatic utterance, "Behold the Lamb of God," they had followed Him to His Own home. Filled with delight at what his own heart found in Him, Andrew found his brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah."

There is a simplicity in this which arrests us. It was neither a new religion nor a new doctrine of which Andrew spoke so enthusiastically, but a Person. The Eternal Son was present upon earth — the long-promised Christ, and Andrew had come to know Him. He then longed that his brother should know Him also. The Evangelist says, "he brought him to Jesus." Why is not this scene being enacted every day? Why is it that Christian men are so commonly filled with zeal for the upbuilding of "a cause" rather than the bringing of men and women into personal touch with Jesus? How comes it, too, that the lips of even earnest souls are so frequently sealed in the presence of their own relatives? However important it may be for me to carry the Gospel to the heathen Chinamen, or to subscribe money for the helping forward of so excellent a work, my first responsibility is towards my own brother. Has every Christian reader of these lines realized this? Behold then these two fishermen coming to Jesus, Simon means "hearkener." Naturally men's ears are closed to God and to Christ; the brother of Andrew was that day getting his ears opened by the Spirit of God. "When Jesus beheld him, He said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone." The giving of names is a mark of lordship, or proprietorship. Thus Adam at the beginning gave names to the beasts. Pharaoh gave a name to Joseph, Nebuchadnezzar to Daniel, etc. (Gen. 2: 20; Gen. 41: 45; Dan. 1: 7). Simon thus became Christ's liege man from that day forward. Indeed everyone will sooner or later have to acknowledge the same Lord.

Cephas, the Evangelist tells us, means "a stone." There was about to be a new thing commenced in the earth — the Church of God and Peter was, through grace, to have a place therein. Let us note carefully his own words as to this — "To whom coming, as unto a Living Stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2: 4-5). Thus the Church of God is a spiritual structure, composed of persons who, like Peter, have come to Christ, and who, in virtue of the divine gift of eternal life, have been constituted living stones. Men's churches, Papal, National and Nonconformist alike, may contain many adherents who have never been in heart contact with Christ; the Church which Christ is building consists exclusively of those who have followed in the footsteps of Andrew and Peter, and who thus have life eternal in the Son of God. That no reader may misunderstand, let it be distinctly stated that that which Christ calls "My Church" in Matt. 16: 18 is the aggregate of believing souls (of whatever name) from the day of Pentecost downwards.

John, as we have seen, gives us Simon's first acquaintanceship with Jesus. This is in perfect accord with the character of the fourth Gospel, which shows us the Father revealed in the Son, and the Son attracting souls to Himself, to be His brethren on high. For Simon's call to service we must look elsewhere. Matthew and Mark give it in connection with a similar summons addressed at the same time to Andrew, James and John; Luke (as his manner is) dwells upon the moral work that was wrought in Simon's soul that day (Luke 5: 1-11).

The native place of our apostle was Bethsaida, on the sea of Galilee (John 1: 44). He and his brother were in partnership with Zebedee and his sons in what seems to have been a large fishing business. At any rate, they had "hired servants" (Mark 1: 20). This being so, we must not understand Acts 4: 13 to mean that these men were altogether uneducated. "Unlearned and ignorant" would simply mean that they had had no such professional training as their ecclesiastical antagonists.

Our apostle will never forget that day by the sea of Galilee. The Saviour, thronged by the multitudes eager to hear the Word of God, asked the loan of a boat that He might address the people the more conveniently. The preaching being ended, He bade Simon launch out into the deep, and let down his nets for a draught. Simon replied that although he had toiled all night unsuccessfully he would do as the Saviour said. The nets were at once filled to breaking point, and the boats, when loaded, began to

sink. The effect upon Simon's soul was electrical. He felt that he was in the presence of the One whose voice said ages before, "Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life" (Gen. 1: 20). He realized indeed that God had come down from heaven to earth. His sinful condition rose up before him — his unfitness to abide in the divine presence. Accordingly he fell at Jesus' knees saying, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." This was deeper work than he had experienced in the day of John 1: 41-42. Job and Isaiah, though true saints of God, had travelled the same road (Job. 42: 5-6; Isa. 6: 5); so likewise has every man who has ever preached the Gospel of Christ with divine qualifications. The first lesson learned in the school of God is one's own sinfulness. Apart from this, the profoundest knowledge of Hebrew and Greek and the most eloquent oratory are worse than useless.

Simon was so absorbed with his spiritual need that he entirely lost sight of the sinking boat. The greater danger made the lesser pale into insignificance. Has the reader been thus at Jesus' knees in similar soul-distress? The Saviour and His costly atonement can never be appreciated (still less preached) until a man has learned his personal guilt and ruin.

One so utterly humbled and broken as Simon was a fit witness for Christ. Accordingly the Saviour said to the trembling fisherman, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." In Jer. 5: 26 we read of leaders in wickedness who "catch men"; here we have Simon commissioned to catch men for Christ and for heaven. For this great work God acknowledges no other means than the Gospel. No new story and no side attractions can ever be expected to receive His sanction. In Acts 2 we have an example of fishing with a net, when three thousand souls were blessed; in Acts 8 we see a man fishing with a hook — Philip landing the individual eunuch for Christ. Both public and individual work remain open to us to-day.

Follow Me.

From the moment of the Saviour's "Follow Me," Simon and his friends threw up their business in order to preach the Word of God. Occasionally such calls reach men still, but they are probably more exceptional than appearances would seem to suggest. Many of those who occupy pulpits and platforms would be more suitably employed following a handicraft like Paul of old.

A Deed of Mercy.

Only two of our Lord's apostles appear to have had the unspeakable honour of welcoming Him under their own roof — Matthew (or Levi) and Peter. Matthew's home was a place of feasting on that occasion (Luke 5: 29); Peter's home was rather a place of mourning. His wife's mother lay sick of a fever — "a great fever," adds Luke the physician. Peter's home appears to have been shared, not only by his mother-in-law, but also by Andrew his brother (Mark 1: 29-31). A pious family circle, we may be assured.

It was an evil day for Christendom when the idea took possession of men's minds that Christ's servants should remain unmarried. Not only has frail flesh been exposed thereby to the gravest moral peril, but apostolic precedent and the plain injunctions of Holy Scripture have alike been defied by the idea. In 1 Cor. 9: 5, where Paul the apostle insists that he had the same right to a wife as to eat and drink, he cites the example of "the other apostles," and expressly names Cephas (Peter). In his first epistle to Timothy (1 Tim. 3), which is occupied largely with ecclesiastical order, he lays it down authoritatively that both Bishops and Deacons should be married men. If the question be raised, "Why then did not Paul take a wife for himself?" the answer must be that he was called to a life of incessant

itineracy, and that over a very wide area. The devoted apostle felt that, under these circumstances, it would be better for him to be absolutely free. But this did not touch his right, upon which he insisted, while putting it aside in self-sacrifice for the furtherance of the work of the Gospel.

It was natural that Peter and Andrew should tell the Lord of their sick relative. He had come down from heaven "to bind up the broken-hearted" (Isa. 61: 1). and He was in fact moving up and down amongst men sympathetically taking their infirmities and bearing their sicknesses. Matthew's paraphrase of Isa. 53: 4, here alluded to, means that He took up men's woes as a burden upon His own spirit (Matt. 8: 17). His sympathy with men in life is the point. It is a mistake to refer Isa. 53: 4 to His atoning death. He had not long entered upon His ministry of healing, and He had just cast a demon out of a man in the midst of a Sabbath-day gathering in the synagogue. Such a marvel filled Peter and Andrew with desire for the poor sufferer at home, "and anon they tell Him of her."

No second appeal was necessary. Attended by James and John, the former partners of Peter and his brother, the Saviour went at once to the fisherman's house. "He came, and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them."

The deed of mercy was soon reported abroad. As the day declined, multitudes came to the house with their sick and diseased ones. Mark says: "All the city was gathered together at the door," However numerous might be the applicants, or however great their desires, nothing could exhaust the Saviour's power and love. As the unwearied servant of God and men He ministered to every form of human need. But what joy it would have given Him had men been as keen for spiritual blessing as for physical benefit! Can bodily healing be compared for one moment with the inestimable boon of sins forgiven?

The Twelve.

Luke tells us it was after a night spent in prayer to God that the Lord Jesus chose His twelve apostles (Luke 6: 12). These presently He sent forth, furnished with extraordinary powers as Matt. 10 shows. This action was altogether without precedent in the ways of God. No prophet of Israel had ever done the like. But a new thing had happened in the earth. Jesus of Nazareth was no mere prophet, like Isaiah and others, but the Son of God come down in divine goodness to tabernacle amongst men. He was therefore God's center here below, and from Himself as center He would send forth others to be the active expression of His grace, and to spoil the kingdom of Satan. For the present both His commission and theirs was to Israel only (Rom. 15: 8; Matt. 10: 5-6); ultimately the glad tidings were to be heralded to the ends of the earth (Mark 16: 15).

Mark tells us that He called the twelve up into a mountain, and there appointed them (3: 13). There was moral suitability in this. All true ministry comes from above; from God, not from the people. Moreover, He called unto Him "whom He would." Here we have divine sovereignty. His will settled all. Neither popular election nor ambitious desire on the part of His servants had anything to do with the matter. Accordingly, Simon Peter stands at the head of the list, though he was not the earliest of the Lord's disciples. Andrew was his senior in the faith (and indeed the instrument of his blessing), yet he was required to fall behind his brother in service. The apostle Paul, in a later day gloried in the fact that man had had nothing whatever to do with his appointment to the ministry. To the Galatians he described himself thus: "Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father who raised Him from the dead" (Gal. 1: 1) Since these words were penned, the will of man has so systematically intruded itself, in one way and another, into the realm of ministry that few in modern Christendom could truthfully speak thus of themselves.

The Lord Jesus ordained the twelve "that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach" (Mark 3: 14). There are two things here companionship with Jesus, and the ministry of the Word, the first being immeasurable the more important and blessed. We are reminded of the Saviour's words to Peter in John 13: 8: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." It is one of the most marvellous fruits of His grace that men should be called to be the companions of the Son of God. In two distinct senses the present day believer in Jesus has "part with Him": (1) in spiritual communion now, and (2) in actual presence in the Father's house eternally. "Part with Him" now has reference to the inner life of the soul. The inward is ever more important than the outward. A man might preach as with the tongue of an angel, to the great admiration of the multitude, and yet be spiritually starved within. To be in hourly touch with Jesus by faith is more important to one's well-being than to be in touch with men, however appreciative. Let every preacher of the Word of life pay careful attention to this.

When all is ended here, there lies beyond the everlasting blessedness of the Father's house. There the Lord Jesus will hold the place of "Firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8: 29). Those He so graciously called to "be with Him" during the days of His humiliation (one only being lost, "the son of perdition") will be with Him in glory also, with no separation for eternity. And not they only, but also all those who have believed on Him through their word (John 17: 20). This takes in every Christian from the beginning down to the present hour. The precious blood of Jesus is our title to be there; new birth by the Spirit of God is our meetness to be there. It is all of sovereign grace alone.

On the way to Jairus' House.

There were three occasions (all special in character) on which Peter and the two sons of Zebedee were alone privileged to accompany the Lord Jesus. We refer to His journeys to the holy mount, to the house of Jairus, and into the recesses of Gethsemane. Our present business is with His visit to Jairus, and with what happened on the way thither.

No sooner did the Saviour hear the appeal of this ruler of the synagogue than He set out for his house. The first tidings stated that his little daughter lay at the point of death; the next message reported that her spirit had passed away. A great multitude pressed around the Lord, curious to see how He would act in such a case. Amongst the people was a woman, who had suffered twelve years from an issue of blood, and who had spent all her living upon physicians, but in vain. She had come to believe that if she could but touch the Saviour's clothes she would be made whole. Forthwith she did so, and was healed according to her faith, Jesus, looking round, asked, "Who touched Me?" Peter (ever ready) objected to the question. Such was the crowd that many were necessarily touching the Lord (Luke 8: 45); But divine omniscience was not likely to confound the touch of faith with the rude push of a curious multitude. In like manner He distinguishes to-day between the great mass of those who, from various motives, throng "places of worship" and those true hearts amongst them who really seek Him in humble faith. Presently the woman found herself at His feet in grateful confession of the blessing received.

This interruption of His journey to Jairus' house is very suggestive dispensationally. The dead girl was a type of Israel, already likened to a valley full of dry bones in Ezek. 37. The Son of God, with life in Himself, had come into their midst with purposes of blessing, as we know. But His mission to Israel has been interrupted (by His rejection), not to be resumed until the end of the present age, when He will a second time visit Zion, and then give full effect to every divine purpose of grace. The people of Israel will in that day be called forth from their long spiritual and national death, to be henceforward God's

channel of blessing to all the earth.

But what is happening during the period of interruption, now nearly nineteen centuries long? Souls of every sort are, like the woman of Luke 8, getting into touch with Jesus (by faith), and are rejoicing both in the blessing of healing, and in the knowledge of Himself. Happy man, happy woman, who is thus spiritually acquainted with the Son of God!

From Matthew we learn that, at the moment of Jairus' appeal, the Saviour was setting forth in His teaching the impossibility of putting new cloth to an old garment, and new wine into old skins (Matt. 9: 14-18). In this parabolic way He would show His hearers that His mission of grace had nothing to do with the legal system of religious ordinances in which they had been brought up. The old order of things, requiring so much from man, had utterly failed to do anything for ruined creatures. Everything now depended upon Jesus. The two cases of the suffering woman and the dead girl, occurring when they did, illustrated His point strikingly. Alas, the lesson has never been learned by Christendom. From the time of the departure of the apostles downward men have been earnestly endeavouring to put new wine into old bottles. By this we mean that every religious community is more or less constructed upon the principles of Jewish formalism, to the serious hindrance of divine blessing to the souls of men. Nothing avails but Jesus. It is our wisdom to get to Him, leaving all men's ecclesiastical machinery aside. The two cases of the woman and the girl also illustrate the two sides of the Gospel — the human and the divine. The girl was dead. All help must therefore come to her from God. For man is powerless in the presence of the ϵ , last enemy. The woman, on the other hand, played her own part. She came to Jesus, and, in faith, put in her plea for blessing. In like manner, men are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2: 1), and need the quickening power of God, and yet men have their responsibility to "come" to the Saviour in response to His call of love (Matt. 11: 28). We may find it difficult to reconcile these two aspects of divine truth, but both are assuredly found in the Word of God.

Walking on the Sea

In our childhood days we were taught to sing, "Pity my simplicity." Simplicity of the right kind calls not for pity, but for admiration and imitation, and most assuredly it will receive the Lord's commendation at the last. Men are becoming too wise to be simple; this explains why some find it hard to credit the story of Peter walking on the sea. To all such we are disposed to say in the words of Paul; "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you?" (Acts 26: 8). Take God into account, and every difficulty disappears; leave Him out, and difficulties bristle around us hopelessly.

It was the night after the feeding of the five thousand, and the disciples, by command of their Lord, were crossing the sea of Galilee in a fishing boat. The Lord mercifully sent them away before the multitude pressed upon Him the kingdom (John 6: 15). Such were their carnal thoughts that such a temptation would almost certainly have carried the disciples along with it. This temporary separation of the Lord from His own is a picture of our circumstances at the present time. Even as He occupied Himself with prayer upon the mountain top then, so is He engaged in a ministry of intercession on our behalf at this moment on high. The disciples found their situation deeply trying without Him. Comparing John 6: 19 with Matt. 14: 25, they appear to have covered but little more than three miles after some nine hours' rowing. Their difficult voyage is strikingly suggestive of the stormy and toilsome passage of the Church during the entire period of her Lord's absence in heaven. In the fourth watch, somewhere between 3 and 6 a.m., the Lord came to His disciples, filling them for the moment with alarm as they beheld Him walking on the water. "It is a spirit," cried they in their terror, which was soon allayed by His comforting voice, saying, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." Why did

He not at once still the raging of the sea, as in Matt. 8: 26? Nay, who can interpret all His ways with His people? On the one occasion He stayed the tempest; this time He comforted them in it, and rendered them superior to it by His grace. In like manner, we have the apostles instantly released from prison in Acts 5: 19, while Peter was suffered to remain in the hands of his persecutors until the last hour in Acts 12: 6, and Paul and Silas at a later date were delivered only by an earthquake (16: 26). Similar differences may be observed in the dealings of God with His people to-day. What we need is simple faith in His goodness that whatever form His dealings take all must be well. It is not always the best thing to be lifted entirely out of the circumstances which distress us, although frail flesh and blood would fain have it so.

The moment he heard the voice of the Lord Peter said, "Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water." This was scarcely presumption, or his Master would not have said, "Come." It was rather the ardour of affection. For a while Peter walked the sea as securely as the Lord Himself; but presently noticing the roughness of the wind, his heart failed him, and he began to sink. Our safety to-day lies in "looking unto Jesus" (Heb. 12: 2). This keeps the heart serene in the midst of life's stormiest billows. Peter could not have traversed the most placid sea apart from divine aid; but this was amply sufficient to uphold him in safety upon the wildest sea.

In his distress Peter appealed to the Lord alone. "Lord, save me." Let us imitate the devoted apostle in this. Are any in distress concerning their sins, and fearful of the wrath to come? Are others in perplexity and need as to the affairs of daily life? Let us turn to Christ alone, who is indeed the only Mediator between God and men. Neither Mary nor the saints in general have such a heart to care as He; and certainly no created being can furnish us with even a modicum of needed grace. Our souls are absolutely shut up to Christ for blessing of every kind. To know Him is to trust and adore Him. The incident before us closes with the disciples worshipping at His feet, exclaiming "of a truth Thou art the Son of God" (Matt. 14: 33). That night at sea yielded to them its blessings for eternity.

Belly and Heart.

The Lord Jesus was in collision with the Pharisees — by no means an unusual occurrence. On this occasion it was because the disciples had not washed their hands before eating. The Pharisees enquired of the Saviour why they thus transgressed the tradition of the elders (Matt. 15). He who is both the Light and the Truth at once exposed their hypocrisy. So punctilious were they in regard to externals that in their eyes even direct disobedience to the Word of God was a small matter so long as their traditionary requirements were maintained. This He proved by their treatment of the fifth commandment. It was their habit to wink at open neglect of needy parents if the priests benefited thereby. This scandal has been witnessed repeatedly even in Christianity, to our shame.

Turning from His captious critics to the multitude, the Saviour said: "Hear and understand: not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." The disciples then drawing His attention to the fact that the Pharisees were scandalised by His apparent contempt for outward observances, He forthwith described them as plants which His heavenly Father had not planted, and which should therefore be rooted up. "Let them alone," said He, "they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into a ditch."

Such a condemnation applies to others than the Pharisees of the first century. There are not wanting those in Christendom to-day who, in their zeal for externals, are prepared to accept as Christians multitudes who have nothing to show but Baptism, Confirmation, and attendance at the Lord's Supper. However important the first and third of these may be as ordinances of the Lord (the

second - Confirmation — being a human device pure and simple), they are worse than useless apart from a living faith in the Son of God. So absolutely evil is the flesh that nothing avails with God but new birth by the Spirit, and cleansing by the blood of Jesus. He who lacks these things possesses neither fitness nor title for the divine presence. The thought is appalling that thousands are being led into an eternal ditch by leaders as spiritually blind as themselves.

Having thus admonished the multitude, the Saviour retired into the house, and Peter asked Him: "Declare unto us this parable." From Mark we learn that the rest of the disciples joined with him in this inquiry (Mark 7: 17).

The fact is that Peter and his companions were as yet far from free in their souls from the religious formalism in which they had been educated. Hence their question, which to us perhaps sounds so simple. But with our gracious Lord no honest inquiry was either rebuked or refused. With great pains He ever sought to lead halting ones into the full light of God, for their blessing. Accordingly He pointed out that all that enters into the mouth goes into the belly, and then becomes purged by nature, so that the man is not defiled. But that which comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart; and the human heart being hopelessly evil all that issues from it is defiling indeed. An awful exposure of the heart follows: "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." This is what both your heart and mine contains, beloved reader. If the grossest of these evils have not broken forth, it is due to the mercy of God in the environment in which He has been pleased to set us, but the evils are most assuredly within us, only awaiting opportunity to show themselves in all their hideousness. What stronger proof could we have that it is not reformation men need, but a new creation! What proof, too, that mere external observances can never of themselves suffice, because they cannot reach to that which is within! If men but realized their own innate corruption, as thus set forth by the Lord Jesus in answer to Peter's inquiry, surely they would palter no more with priests and their doings, but hasten at once to the Saviour's feet, where alone blessing can be found for eternity.

We Believe and Know.

Such language of holy confidence is proper to the children of God concerning every blessing; though, alas, it is not always heard. A fearful trembling faith, sure of nothing, is as characteristic of the twentieth century as a bold unquestioning faith was characteristic of the first. To such a condition of mind have nineteen centuries of ecclesiasticism reduced even the best of God's saints.

We have quoted in part a fine confession of faith by Simon Peter. It will be found in full in John 6: 68-69. It occurred at the close of a discourse which sorely puzzled many of our Lord's hearers. He had been speaking in the synagogue in Capernaum, whither the multitude had come in search of Him after His feeding of the five thousand. In His ministry He sought to lift their thoughts above the bread that perisheth. He spoke of Himself as "the living bread which came down from heaven," telling His audience that "if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever," then adding, "and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6: 51). These words at once provoked discussion, some saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"

The Saviour's evident meaning was that He alone could meet the need of the soul but that such was man's condition before God He must go down into death ere He could be really available for any. A living Christ on earth might give us much wonderful instruction; but men being sinners, altogether ruined and undone, it is not mere instruction that is needed, but life and salvation. Ere these blessings could be divinely granted, the Saviour must die atoningly. Now God asks from men simple appropriation in faith of the Christ who died. This is the meaning of the Saviour's words, "Whoso

eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life," etc.

Here we are compelled to challenge a very common and popular blunder. It is well-nigh; universally held in Christendom that these words have reference to the Lord's Supper. This may explain the eager haste with which sacramental bread and wine are frequently carried to the sick and dying. Such gross materialism, we are bold to affirm, never entered the Saviour's mind as He stood discoursing in the synagogue in Capernaum. The Lord's Supper had not as yet been instituted; how then could He be making allusion to it? Had He really intended this how could His hearers be expected to understand Him? To apply these words of the Saviour to the Lord's Supper lands us into two monstrous errors; first, everyone who has ever partaken of the Supper necessarily has eternal life; and second, those who have never partaken thereof are lost, however genuine their faith in the Saviour's name. Every right-minded soul will instinctively shrink from both propositions. Many a regular communicant will be found outside at the last, never having really believed in the Saviour; and on the other hand, many who have never communicated at all (as our mistaken "Quaker" friends), will be found inside, having really loved the Son of God.

The famous passage in John 6 has thus no reference to a Sacrament at all, but to faith's appropriation of the once-slain One as Him who alone can meet the need of the soul. He who says from his heart "I believe He died for me," in this way eats His flesh and drinks His blood, and so receives eternal life as the gift of sovereign grace. In vv. 51-54 the Greek aorist is employed, signifying an act which abides in its effects for ever; in vv. 56-58 the Lord uses the present participle, insisting thus upon an every-day feeding upon Himself for the sustainment of the life within. We eat to get life, and we continue to eat for the maintenance of the life.

Many of those in the synagogue that day, even though professedly His disciples, were so carnally minded that they said: "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" They were following Him with thoughts of a glorious kingdom; and the mention of death stumbled them. Accordingly many of them turned back, and walked no more with Him. This caused the Lord to challenge the twelve: "Will ye also go away?" Peter promptly replied: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and know that Thou art the Holy One of God" (see R.V. of John 6: 67-69). Happy Peter! His heart found its all in the Saviour before him. In like manner what "Thou hast" and what "Thou art" is sufficient to-day to satisfy every longing of the soul until glory dawns.

N.B. — Would the Saviour be likely to cast men upon Sacraments for eternal life, knowing well that priests of every brand, in their sectarian zeal, would be disposed to repudiate as false the Sacraments of all others? With the conflicting claims of Greeks, Romanists, Anglicans, etc., before him, where is the simple inquirer to find certainty? God be praised, we are not driven to investigate the rival claims of all these in order to obtain eternal life. The Word of God and the Christ of God are both available for us all. In these our souls may safely confide.

"Upon This Rock"

Peter's fervent confession of his Lord in the neighbourhood of Caesarea Philippi has always possessed a special interest for the children of God. As a kind of test for His disciples, the Saviour inquired: "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" They replied that no one seemed to know with certainty; John the Baptist, Elijah and Jeremiah being amongst the various suggestions of the curious. This, of course, revealed the true condition of men's minds in regard to Him. They were in reality utterly indifferent as to Him. Had they desired to know who He was, ample means were at their command whereby they might test His claims. The Saviour then turned to His own followers, and said:

“But whom say ye that I am?” Peter, the ever ready one, promptly replied: “Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16: 13-18). With Peter and his friends there was no uncertainty as to the glorious Person with whom they walked. Taught, not by flesh and blood, but by the Father, they had a divine conviction that He was not only the long-expected Christ, but also the Son of the living God.

The Saviour followed the appreciation of His servant's words thus: “And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell (Hades) shall not prevail against it.” It is as if He said: “Now Peter, My Father has told you something about Me, I will tell you something about yourself.” Christ was about to build His own assembly, the work being actually commenced on the day of Pentecost, and continuing unto the present hour. His prediction involved the setting aside of Israel at least for a season. Fifteen centuries earlier that nation had been separated from all others to be the people of Jehovah, His special witness upon earth. In Nebuchadnezzar's day, six hundred years before the Saviour came to earth, the “loam” sentence (“not My people”) had been passed upon them, although subsequently, in the mercy of God, a remnant of them were suffered to return to their land, and rebuild the temple. But their rejection of the Lord Jesus ended even this partial recovery of divine favour. Accordingly the Saviour says, “I will build My Church.” This includes all believing people, without regard to nation, from the Pentecostal descent of the divine Spirit until the Lord Jesus comes again.

Just what place was Peter to have in this new and spiritual structure? He was to be a stone therein, for that is the meaning of “Peter” or “Cephas,” as John 1: 42 shows conclusively. In the Kingdom of Heaven (with which we will deal later, if God permit) this apostle was to hold a unique position but not in the Church. To confound the Kingdom of Heaven with the Church is one of the most unfortunate blunders conceivable. We have only to turn to 1 Peter 2: 4-5 to learn from his own pen how Peter understood the words of our Lord. — To all his believing readers the apostle says: “To Whom coming, as unto a Living Stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house,” etc. Peter thus extends the figure of the stone to every Christian, meaning by his words that every Christian is possessed of the imperishable life of the Son of God Himself.

What then is the rock upon which the Church is being built? The Saviour Himself, in the special character in which Peter had just confessed Him — “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” This was the first time He had been thus acknowledged. His resurrection-power is thus set forth. The Church is founded on One against whom death is absolutely powerless, and, accordingly it stands guaranteed for ever. “The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it”; the unseen world will never be permitted to swallow it up. When Christ returns He will find His Church still upon the earth, awaiting His coming. The personnel of it has changed repeatedly since Pentecost, but the Church is one and the same throughout in the divine account. At the Lord's return every living believer will be translated to the Father's house without experiencing the pangs of death; and at the same blissful moment every sleeping saint will be raised from the tomb to share in the triumph of that hour (John 11: 25-26). Matt. 16: 18 is thus a guarantee of indestructibility, not of infallibility, and this, not for man's ecclesiastical organisations, Western or Eastern, but for the aggregate of His believing blood-washed people of whatever name.

Desperate efforts have been put forth, in the interests of priestly pretension, to prove Peter the Church's rock-foundation; and this in spite of the strong protests of many of the (so-called) “Fathers” of ancient time, and of the entire East, of which, after all, the Western Church is but an off-shoot. Peter's sad defection at Antioch, as recorded in Gal. 2: 11-16, may well fill us with gratitude that upon no such frail foundation the Church rests, but upon the living and exalted Christ, who is “the same yesterday,

and to-day, and for ever" (Heb. 13: 8).

The Keys.

We have already pointed out that it is a fatal mistake to confound the Church with the Kingdom of Heaven. The Lord Jesus, having spoken to Peter of the one in Matt. 16: 18, proceeded in the next verse to speak to him of the other. These are His words: "And I will give unto thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Thus it was not the keys of the Church, still less of Heaven, that were committed to our apostle, but of the Kingdom of Heaven. What is meant by this expression, so frequently found in the Gospel of Matthew, and there only in Holy Scripture? It is first used in chap. 3: 2. The Baptist's proclamation is thus summarised: "Repent ye: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." The preacher meant that the glorious kingdom spoken of so abundantly in the prophets (notably in Dan. 2: 44), which was to have Jerusalem for its metropolis, and God's Christ for its ruler, had now come into view, the King having been born into the world. The Kingdom of Heaven is thus the reign of Heaven over the earth, in contrast with all the faulty creature administration with which men have been so long familiar. Following the Baptist, the Lord Jesus preached in the same strain; and latter, the twelve apostles (Matt. 4: 17; Matt. 10: 7). But the growing contempt of the people soon made it manifest that no such kingdom could be established at that season. Accordingly, in Matt. 13, in a series of parables, the Lord unfolded "the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven." In other words, He communicated to His disciples the hitherto unrevealed secrets connected with the kingdom. Examining Matt. 13 with care, we gather from it that the king would be absent from the earth for a period, and that during His absence a sadly mingled condition of things would prevail, through the unfaithfulness and neglect of His responsible servants. Wheat and tares would grow side by side in His field, and both good and bad fish would be gathered into the net. To put it yet more plainly, while the manifested kingdom, which no eye will fail to see in its day, stands over, there would be developed a system of religious profession in the earth containing within itself elements both excellent and evil. It is of this, and of this only, the keys were entrusted to Peter. The prime use of keys is to open doors (Rev. 3: 7). Accordingly, in Acts 2 we have Peter divinely selected to preach the first discourse after the Holy Ghost came down from heaven, and three thousand persons were brought to repentance, being baptised forthwith in the Saviour's name. But these were Jews only. In Acts 10 we have the same apostle proclaiming Christ for the first time to a Gentile congregation, with the happy result that all who were assembled in Cornelius' house believed, and were granted the privilege of Christian baptism forthwith. Speaking of this event afterwards, Peter said: "Brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the Word of the Gospel and believe." (Acts 15: 7).

Peter has thus used the keys entrusted to him by the Lord, and the door of the kingdom has been thrown open to both Jews and Gentiles. The Church belongs to heaven; the kingdom belongs to earth of the latter only have the keys been committed to human hands. But what of the binding and loosing? This has reference to discipline here below, eternal issues being in Christ's keeping alone. Peter's stern dealing with Ananias and Sapphira, and with Simon Magus, are incidents illustrative of binding. Is there anything successional in this authority committed to the apostle? There is no hint of such a thing in Matt. 16: 19. Nothing beyond a personal commission can possibly be deduced from the Saviour's words. But when we pass to Matt. 18: 18 we find the very same words in an altogether different connection. Peter is not there in view, but the assembly of God's saints, gathered together in any given locality upon earth, and at any time. Even supposing the number be but "two or three," the authority to

“bind” and “loose” is with them, the Lord's own presence in the midst supplying them with the necessary power and grace. To receive into communion from the world outside is to “loose”; to put away a transgressor, such as he of 1 Cor. 5, is to “bind”; to welcome once more the repentant one, as in 2 Cor. 2: 6-8, is to “loose” again. But in all this heaven is not in question. To import such an idea unto the Saviour's words is to produce inextricable confusion, to say nothing of the spiritual terrors thus injected into the minds of the unthinking. The apostle is gone but the Church remains; though as far as its external unity and order is concerned it has degenerated into a shapeless wreck. But wherever two or three are gathered together unto the name of the absent Christ, His presence is assured, conveying with it all that is needed in grace and competency to act for Him until He come.

"Get Thee Behind Me Satan"

A more terrible reproof than this could scarcely be administered to a man born of God. What did Peter do to deserve it? Let us see.

The Saviour, after His announcement concerning His Church, charged the disciples to proclaim Him no more as the Christ, and from that point began to speak plainly to them of His impending passion (Matt. 16: 21). His kingdom rights were thus to be waived for the time being, while another (and higher) purpose of God took shape — the calling out of the Church. But in order that this might be, He must suffer and die. “Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying:” Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee.” The Revised Version goes too far in its marginal rendering of the apostle's first words — “God have mercy upon Thee.” Darby gives it literally — “Be favourable unto Thyself, Lord.” Unquestionably Peter meant well. He could not bear to think of suffering and shame for his beloved Master and Lord. But Satan frequently makes use of amiable nature in order to turn aside God's witnesses from the path of faithfulness. He would fain do this even with the Saviour Himself. But His divinely opened ear (Isa. 50: 5) caught immediately the hiss of the serpent, even though the speaker was a devoted disciple, and He promptly silenced it. “He turned to Peter and said 'Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men'.” There was “no honey” in Jehovah's meal-offering (Lev. 2: 11). Accordingly the Lord no more spared Peter than the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23). But what a painful suggestion is here! The same lips can give expression both to the Father's thoughts, and to the guile of Satan (Matt. 16: 17 and 23)! Well may we each one of us put up the Psalmist's prayer: “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Ps. 141: 3).

Peter's error gave the Lord the opportunity of pointing out the character of the path which all His own must tread. “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it.” Thus if the cross must needs be His portion, His followers must accept the cross also. For Him, of course, the cross meant atonement for sin, as well as rejection and shame; we share the rejection and shame only. But nature shrinks from, and even resents, this. Its motto (suggested by Satan? is “Spare thyself”; God's motto is “Deny thyself.” It has been truly said that Peter “at the last denied the Lord because he had not denied himself.”

Be it observed that the Lord did not say to Peter what He said to his seducer on another occasion. To His misguided disciple He said, “Get thee behind me, Satan; to the adversary himself He said, “Get thee hence, Satan” (Matt. 4: 10). A faulty disciple might be dismissed to the rear, as offensive to his Master for the moment; but the adversary himself He absolutely dismissed from His presence.

On The Holy Mount.

Bible readers are sometimes perplexed as to the meaning of our Lord's words in Matt. 16: 28: "Verily, I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in His kingdom." His reference was undoubtedly to the Transfiguration scene, which follows this utterance immediately in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

The Lord thus furnishes us with the key to that marvellous vision which Peter and the two sons of Zebedee were alone privileged to behold. It was a picture beforehand of the glory which every eye will see when He comes forth presently to claim His kingdom. This will explain why John (the only one of the four Evangelists who witnessed it) omits all mention of it in his Gospel. His theme is not the human kingdom-glory of the Son of man, but His divine glory as the Eternal Son, as displayed in His moral perfection when tabernacling here below.

Writing of the Transfiguration scene later, Peter says with ecstasy, "We were eye witnesses of His majesty." What he saw was to him "the power and coming Of our Lord Jesus Christ, which confirms the interpretation just given (2 Peter 1: 16-17). The Saviour's face shone as the sun. As the Sun of righteousness He will yet arise upon this poor earth (Mal. 4: 2). The sun is the emblem of supreme authority, which God will ere long put into the hands of the Crucified. His raiment, too, became white as the light, suggestive of the absolute purity of His coming administration. Two men appeared in glory with Him — Moses and Elias. The first was one who had died, the other was translated without seeing death. These are representative characters, speaking to us of the entire company of the glorified saints, many of whom will experience resurrection at the Lord's return, others being changed in a moment, and caught up to meet Him in the air (1 Thess. 4: 16-17). All these will be displayed in glory with Him when He comes to inaugurate His kingdom. Moses and Elijah were in conversation with the Lord; their theme (Luke tells us) was "His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." This will be the everlasting theme of the saints above. The scene that was enacted outside the gate of Jerusalem, at the place called Calvary, will live in the memory of both God and His redeemed while eternal ages roll. There was laid in blood the immutable basis of all our blessing.

Poor impulsive Peter made a sad mistake upon the holy mount. So delighted was he to see his Master in such respected company that he forthwith proposed to make three tabernacles, "one for Thee, and one for Moses and one for Elias." This soon after the Saviour's stern rebuke in Matt. 16: 22! Peter had actually fallen to the level of the idle multitude who speculated amongst themselves whether Jesus were John the Baptist, Elias Jeremiah, or one of the old prophets risen again (Matt. 16: 14); never suspecting, in their blindness, His divine personality. Now Peter would put Him whom he had confessed as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," upon a level with mere prophets, as of course Moses and Elias were. The words had scarce passed his lips when the Shekinah cloud, not seen in Israel since the days of Nebuchadnezzar, appeared, and enveloped both Jesus and His companions. Out of the bright cloud came forth the Father's voice, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased hear ye Him." It was right to listen to both law and prophets in their day, but now the Son had come, with His full revelation of the Father, and everyone must make room for Him. Accordingly, Moses and Elias disappeared, and the disciples saw Jesus only.

Let all who respect Peter the apostle profit by the Father's rebuke to him, and beware how they enshrine saints along with Jesus. Even the most honourable are as nothing in comparison with Him; and to Him alone may men look for salvation, help, and blessing. Our eternal destiny depends, not upon our attitude towards Moses, Peter, Mary, or any other, but upon our attitude towards their Master

and Lord. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not (obeyeth not — R.V.) the Son shall not see life: but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3: 36).

As they descended from the mount the Saviour bade the disciples say nothing concerning the vision until after His resurrection. In the humour that was prevailing in Israel it would be incongruous to proclaim kingdom glories. Suffering was before Him, with eternal salvation for every believer as the result. The kingdom must stand over until the dawn of another age.

The Tribute Money.

Another unfortunate incident, as far as our apostle was concerned, but an incident which exhibits, in a truly marvellous manner, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ towards all His own. He and the twelve were staying in Capernaum — His own city by adoption after He gave up Nazareth. The collectors of the half-shekel took the opportunity to raise the question with Peter as to whether his Master paid the impost. It was neither tribute for the Roman conquerors, nor atonement money as in Ex. 30: 13, but a charge levied upon every male Jew for the support of the temple in Jerusalem (Matt. 17: 24-27).

Peter regarded the inquiry as a challenge as to the honour and religious fidelity of his Master, and so promptly replied, "Yes." Had the apostle been mindful of the Father's words on the holy mount, he might have said to the collectors: "My Master pay tribute? Do you know who He is — the Father's beloved Son, greater than Moses and Elias, Lord of heaven and earth?" But Peter said nothing of this sort, his soul being influenced by merely human thoughts at that moment.

As he entered the house, his Master anticipated him by saying: "What thinkest thou, Simon? Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? Of their own sons, or of strangers?" Peter found himself thus face to face with Omniscience. His innermost thoughts were known to the Lord before he could give expression to them with his lips. To his Master's question He could but reply, "Of strangers", and he was immediately told, "Then are the sons free." Thus did the Lord remind His faulty disciple of His personal dignity. He was the Son of the great King whose earthly house was the Jerusalem temple, and from Him nothing could properly be demanded. But, oh, the grace that shines in the plural word "sons." He thus put the humble fisherman alongside Himself, as sharing His relationship with the Ruler of the universe. This is the place into which every believer has been brought by sovereign grace. We are not servants, but sons, and because we are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4: 5-7). All the sons are being brought to glory — that is their proper home (Heb. 2: 10), and they will yet be manifested in the company of the First-born Son for the deliverance of the burdened creation (Rom. 8: 19).

But, this is not yet. Meanwhile the Son is unrecognised amongst men, and the "many sons" are likewise unrecognised; often, indeed, regarded as "the offscouring of all things." The Lord takes here the "stranger's" place for Himself and for His people. Accordingly He would submit to the collector's demand, and He would have Peter submit with Him. No thought of resistance, whether "passive" or active, to earth's authorities, could receive His sanction. "Lest we offend (or stumble) them," was the gracious word of Him who came here for men's good, and who was prepared to sacrifice Himself to the last degree for their blessing.

But he had not the money wherewith to pay, even though the sum for both was but a coin! Oh, the poverty of the Lord of all! But this poor and needy One soon gave proof of His sovereignty of the universe by bidding Peter go to the sea, and cast a hook, assuring him that the first fish thus caught

would contain in its mouth the coin that was required. It was even as He said. Winds, waves, fishes, demons - all recognised in Him their Lord. It was only man who was utterly blind to His glory.

"Give unto them for Me and Thee." Etiquette would say "thee and me." But the Son of the living God could never take the second place. He might put Peter and all other believers alongside Himself in His wondrous grace, but it nevertheless became Him to effectually mark the distinction between the objects of His favour and Himself, Firstborn and Leader of the whole heavenly band.

"Seventy Times Seven."

Peter had just been listening to a wonderful exposition of divine grace when he inquired of his Lord: "How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times?" (Matt. 18: 21).

The whole chapter should be pondered in connection with this deeply important question. Therein we learn the spirit that becomes those who belong to the Kingdom of Heaven. In order to present His thoughts vividly to the minds of His disciples, the Saviour called a little child, and set him in the midst of them as the suited pattern of humility and simplicity. Amongst men it is customary for the most assertive to become the greatest; amongst the heirs of the kingdom it is the lowliest that will ultimately have the principal place. Proceeding, the Lord Jesus showed that those who follow Him should be careful not to stumble one another (even the most insignificant); and should guard with equal care against putting hindrances in the way of their own steps. Supposing trespasses to arise, all the resources of grace were to be tried before treating an offender as a heathen man and a publican (i.e., a Roman tax-collector).

It was at this point that our apostle came forward with his question. The tone of it suggests that Peter thought he had learned the Lord's lesson thoroughly. "How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" In Peter's esteem this was a magnificent stretch of grace. Alas, how seldom poor flesh and blood goes so far! How often, instead, does the offended one insist upon his utmost right in the way of abject apology, thus humiliating his brother into the very dust before him! It was not without reason that the wise man said: "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city" (Prov. 18: 19). It is frequently difficult enough to wring forgiveness even once out of one's fellow.

But what did the gracious Lord reply? "I say not unto thee, 'Until seven times,' but until seventy times seven." Grace without limit is what He meant, and this after the pattern of the infinite grace of God as revealed to us in the Gospel. In order to emphasise this, He added a parable wherein a man is represented as owing his lord two millions of money, and being graciously forgiven in response to his appeal for mercy; then going forth, and falling in with a fellow-servant who owed him about three pounds, he seized him by the throat, and heedless of his piteous appeal, he enforced upon him the utmost rigor of the law (Matt. 18: 23-25). What an exposure of the awful possibilities that lurk in the human heart! A man may conceivably have received at the hands of the God against whom he has sinned a full pardon for all his offences in virtue of the atoning sacrifice of Calvary, and then refuse to show mercy to a fellow mortal who has transgressed against him! A beggar with God, and a tyrant with men! Oh, the appalling inconsistency.

Listen to the gentle appeal of the divine Spirit in Eph. 4: 32; Eph. 5: 1: "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as also God in Christ hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore imitators of God as beloved children." (See R.V.).

“What Shall WE have?”

It was a painful moment when the rich young ruler, whose eager running and earnest inquiry suggested the deepest desire, turned away from the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us the sad story Mark supplying the beautiful detail — “Jesus beholding him, loved him” (Mark 10: 21). The world was too strong for this young man. When he understood that to follow the Master he admired would involve shame and loss he turned back regretfully, “for he had great possessions. This led the Saviour to remark to His disciples that it is exceedingly difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. They in their astonishment asked: “Who then can be saved?” He replied that it aught depended upon man, salvation would be impossible for any, “but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19: 16-26).

What a treacherous thing is the human heart! The very blessings of God, which should dispose the heart toward Him, are only used to His utter exclusion! The more abundantly God pours His favours into a man's lap, the less inclined he is to acknowledge Him. Hence the words in Luke 7: 22, “to the poor the Gospel is preached.”

Then Peter stepped forward. “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?” The commercialism of such a question is truly painful. As addressed to One who had left heavenly glory, yea, who had “emptied Himself” for the blessing of men, the question was little short of an outrage. What was the “all” that Peter and his friends had forsaken? Just fishing boats and tackle. and a few family comforts. And what had they gained even in the present life? The knowledge of God as revealed in the Son, and the daily companionship of the Son of the Father's love. As the Saviour pointed out to them in Matt. 13: 16-17, they were the most privileged men the world had seen up to that hour. Yet Peter asked: “What shall we have?”

But even if a wrong thought was running in the mind of the apostle. this did not hinder the Lord from showing that a positive reward was in store for them for their attachment to His person in His humiliation. “Verily, I say unto you, that ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit upon the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones) judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19: 28). The “regeneration” here is “the world to come” of Heb. 2: 5, “the restitution of all things” of Acts 3: 21 — in other words, the Millennial kingdom. It is called the “regeneration” because in that age evil will be put down and righteousness will be exalted. In that age all the saints will reign (even the faulty Corinthians 1 Cor. 6: 2-3), but places will be allotted according to the fidelity of each in the present life, a special place being reserved for the apostles in connection with the twelve tribes of Israel, as the Saviour informed Peter in the passage before us. The portion of the apostles is indicated in v. 28; the more general portion of all believers in the verse following, with the significant addition, “but many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first.”

Salvation is by grace alone, and it is based upon the Saviour's blood. Consequently in this connection there can be no question of “first” and “last,” the precious blood having the same value for all, from the most honoured apostle down to the humblest soul who truly believes. All will therefore be found together in the Father's house, all equally near and dear to both the Father and the Son. But in the kingdom another principle has its place, and the righteous government of God will allot positions to His own according to their fidelity or otherwise now. That day will probably yield many surprises. Many whom men anticipated would be first may stand very low down indeed; and many of whom men thought nothing may then stand very high. With our God it is not outward appearances that count, but the condition of the heart towards Himself. No thrones for the apostles until the day of Christ. In this world they hungered and thirsted, they were naked and buffeted, reviled, persecuted, defamed, treated

as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things (1 Cor. 4: 11-13). From whence then comes the thrones on which the boasted "successors" of the apostles now sit?

Watching and Working.

Our apostle was possessed of an inquiring mind. The Lord's replies to his various questions have furnished the people of God with much valuable instruction unto this hour. In Luke 12: 41 we hear Peter asking: "Lord, speak Thou this parable unto us, or even unto all?" It will be necessary to glance back at the preceding verses in order to understand what was in the apostle's mind.

Throughout the chapter the Lord is seeking to draw the hearts of His own away from earth to heaven. The events which had taken place (see Luke 11) had made it perfectly plain that the predicted kingdom could not be established at that season, and that Jesus must go away, despised and rejected of men. During His absence His own must expect persecution and loss, but whatever comes they must confess Him before men. They are to beware of covetousness, and are to trust in the Father, who knows their every need. The Lord seeks to cheer His own by telling them that it is the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom. The kingdom is thus sure, if delayed, and it is to be committed to the hands of all who believe in the Saviour's name. Meanwhile, our hearts are to be in heaven, seeing that Christ, our Treasure, is there, Our attitude is to be that of expectation, for He may come in the second watch or in the third — He has not said when.

Watching and working are to occupy believers until the Lord returns, the former being by far the most important. One might labour in His service from a great variety of motives; it is only possible to watch if the affections are really centered upon Himself. The reward for watching is loving service on the part of the Lord when He gets us home (v. 37); the recompense for working is a stewardship in His kingdom (v. 44). It was in connection with all this priceless instruction that Peter inquired: "Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?"

In His reply, the Lord dealt with the whole question of responsibility during His absence, and showed distinctly how everyone will be dealt with at His return. He speaks first of those who have accepted the duty of giving His household their portion of meat in due season (vv. 42-46). He who, from pulpit or platform, or otherwise does this in faithfulness and wisdom is called "Blessed" — his reward is so great. But if one charged with such service says in his heart, "My Lord delayeth His coming," and forthwith gives himself up to self-indulgence, his Lord will come upon him when he is not aware, and will assign him his eternal portion with unbelievers. Awful possibility for some who in our day stand forth as the public teachers of the flock of God!

Following this up, the Lord differentiates between men who know His will and yet prepare not themselves, and those who in ignorance of His will follow the bent of their evil nature. This is just the difference between Christendom (especially Protestantism with its open Bible) and Heathendom (vv. 47-48). It will be "more tolerable" for some in the day of judgement than for others. Not that the place or duration of punishment varies for any of the lost. Eternity in the lake of fire is the portion of all who die in their sins. Yet the Saviour speaks of "few stripes" and "many stripes," showing degrees of severity in the divine inflictions. There are no people on earth more deeply responsible than the dwellers in Great Britain. The Bible, with its plain exposures of sin and guilt, and its wonderful unfoldings of redeeming love as shown in the cross of Jesus, is accessible to all. Let every British reader then ponder the solemn declaration of v. 48: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."

A Lesson in faith.

The Saviour did not sleep in Jerusalem during the last sorrowful week, even though His daily ministry was exercised in that city. Glad to escape from its religious hypocrisy, He went out each evening to Bethany for refreshment to His spirit as well as for bodily repose. On one of His morning journeys, being hungry, He paused at a fig tree, "if haply He might find anything thereon." The tree was full of leaves, but though the time for gathering the figs had not come, not a vestige of fruit was there. Accordingly He cursed it in the solemn words: "No man eat fruit of thee henceforward for ever" (Mark 11: 12-26).

Next morning, as the Lord and His disciples passed the spot again, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots, whereupon Peter said: "Master, behold the fig tree which Thou cursedst is withered away." But should this have surprised the apostle? Was there not potency in the words of Jesus for even greater marvels still? For the voice which cursed the fruitless fig tree was none other than that which ages before said, "Let there be light," and there was light (Gen. 1: 3).

The Lord took occasion by Peter's remark to point out to him and to all the possibilities which always lie in the way of faith. Even a mountain can be cast into the sea. "Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." It is a very real thing to have to do with God. Distrust has been natural to the human heart ever since the serpent injected his poison into the mind of our first mother. A new era begins for the soul when the Gospel of Christ is believed. God, as the One who gave His Son, and who raised Him from the dead, becomes known, loved, and trusted. Then from that day forward it is the easiest thing in the world to refer everything to Him, and to confide in His love and care. The simplicity of the little child is really all that is required.

Mark adds two important verses which are not given by Matthew. "When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any," etc. We may perhaps find in these words a suggestion as to why many believers' prayers go unanswered. If I bear a grudge against any one, clearly I have not a good conscience towards God. The simplicity of which we have spoken is not present in such a case, and it is impossible for me to be happy and unrestrained in the divine presence. It is as necessary to be "without wrath" as "without doubting" if I would receive favours from the good hand of God (1 Tim. 2: 8).

The Saviour's words at that time have a dispensational bearing as well as a moral significance. The disappointing fig tree was an emblem of fruitless Israel. For fifteen centuries that nation had been signally favoured by God, but the result was nil. Religious profession was there, as abundant as the leaves of the fig tree; but fruit, in the way of love to God and delight in His will, there was none. Israel was therefore about to fall under the divine curse. The mountain is an emblem, of their polity — "our place and nation," as Caiaphas expressed it in John 11: 48. This was soon to be overthrown by the Roman legions under Titus, and the people were to be lost in the sea of the nations.

An important question arises here. Has Christendom, with its even greater favours, been more fruitful for God than Israel? Most assuredly not. Accordingly the solemn sentence of Rom. 11: 22 must soon take effect: "Thou also shalt be cut off." Add to this the threat of the Lord Jesus in Rev. 3: 16: "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spue thee out of My mouth." There is this difference, however, between Israel and Christendom. Of the believing remnant of Israel, God will in the last days raise up for Himself a new stock in the earth which shall be for His pleasure; when God deals with Christendom, its judgement will be final and irrevocable. What men call "Christendom" will never be seen on earth again.

The Olivet Question!

Our Lord's great prophetic utterance on Mount Olivet, delivered during His last week, is recorded with more or less fullness by Matthew, Mark and Luke, but we are indebted to Mark for the interesting fact that the prophecy was drawn forth by the questions of Peter and his former partners in the fishing profession, Andrew, James and John (Mark 13: 3). So that we have our apostle once more playing the part of the inquirer. The Saviour had just spoken of the doom of Jerusalem and its temple as the result of Israel's persistent rejection of Himself. Naturally this struck painfully upon the ears of men who were ardently expecting a glorious kingdom to be established in the earth, with Jesus as its Sovereign, and Jerusalem as its metropolis. Accordingly the four disciples named asked Him privately when this calamity should take place, inquiring also as to His coming and the end of the age. For His words suggested to their minds that if there could be no kingdom just then, there must needs be a second coming in order that the ancient prophecies might be fulfilled. (See Matt. 23: 39). Matthew was led of the Spirit to concentrate his attention upon what the Lord said in His reply concerning the end of the age (Matt. 24, Matt. 25); Mark, according to his wont makes a special feature of the Lord's remarks as to the trials of His servants, in the critical time referred to (Mark 13); and Luke dwells almost exclusively upon the Lord's reply to the first of Peter's questions, that relating to the impending Roman desolation (Luke 21). It is impossible to deal adequately with this greatest of all prophecies within our present limits. Only a few suggestions can be attempted. The whole utterance finds its focus, not in Christendom, but in Jerusalem and Judea. Its prime idea is the sufferings that must needs fall upon God's ancient people because of their rejection of the Messiah, come into their midst in grace. Within the lifetime of our Lord's contemporaries Jerusalem was to be compassed with armies and be utterly overthrown. Its people should fall in multitudes, many others should be sold into captivity — "and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." How literally all this had been accomplished every schoolboy knows. Luke, from whom we have just quoted, appends a few words as to further happenings at the end of the age, when the period of Israel's humiliation reaches its termination (Luke 21: 20-36).

Matthew says nothing as to the impending desolation. The key-verse of the prophecy, as he records it, is Matt. 24: 15: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place." This is the image of the Beast of Rev. 13: 1 which will be set up in Israel's restored sanctuary in the reign of the Antichrist. Our Lord counsels flight when this takes place, for then will be developed the fiercest persecution of godly ones that the world has ever known. The great tribulation will be immediately followed by His own appearing in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. These predictions bring us down to Matt. 24: 31, at which point six parables are introduced parenthetically, the main line of the prophecy being resumed in Matt. 25: 31 with the words: "When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations," etc. This is not the judgement of the dead, which will not take place until a thousand years subsequent to His appearing; It is the judgement of the quick (or living) — an article of faith to be found in most of the creeds of Christendom, if but little understood by those who repeat them.

There was never a moment in the world's history when this great prophecy, elicited by Peter and his friends, demanded more careful attention at the hands of the devout than the present. We are manifestly on the eve of great changes. A universal cataclysm is considered more than probable even by many to whom God and His Word are unknown, and who therefore only judge by what they see transpiring around them. It is highly desirable that God's true people should have right expectations, and these can only be gleaned from Holy Scripture. When we consider things in the light of God, our

minds are preserved in a correct balance, our faith is strengthened, and we possess our souls in patience and peace even in the midst of the overturning of all things.

Feet Washing.

It was much more than a lesson in humility that the Lord Jesus sought to impart to His disciples when He arose from the last supper and proceeded to wash all their feet (John 13). The condescension on His part, as the Father's well-beloved Son into whose hands all things had been given, was amazing, and the lesson in lowliness and loving care was indeed profound; but there was immeasurably more than this in the act. His words to Peter in verse 7 indicate another meaning than that which was apparent at the moment. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

The key to this remarkable incident is found in verse 3. "Jesus knowing that He was come from God and went to God." A heavenly Person has thus been here, and has returned again to His glory on high, but one great object of His coming was to fit a company of sinful men to have part with Himself in His own blest abode for ever. His washing of the disciples' feet has thus a moral connection with the Father's eternal purpose of love concerning them.

Mark the various steps. The Lord and His companions had just taken their seats at the supper table. (Verse 2 reads more intelligently in the Revised Version, and ceases to conflict with verse 26). In the full consciousness of His personal dignity He arose, and having furnished Himself with a towel and a basin of water He proceeded to wash the disciples' feet, a service usually rendered by slaves in the homes of the wealthy. Peter expressed his astonishment: "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?" Both pronouns are emphatic. The Son of the living God perform menial service to a Galilean fisherman! Peter could not endure the thought: "Thou shalt never wash my feet." The phrase here rendered "never" is the strongest of which the Greek language is capable, so energetic was our apostle in his protest. To this his Master replied: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." Then the impulsive Peter said: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands, and my head." In his eyes part with Christ (whatever it might mean) was a thing most earnestly to be desired. But he was told "he that is washed (or bathed) needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit"; and this was true of every person in the room, with the single exception of Judas, as the Lord solemnly hinted.

This conversation makes it abundantly clear that the foot-washing of that night is significative of a moral cleansing of which every Christian is a partaker through grace. There is a total washing, as shown in verse 10, which can never be repeated. This is the new birth, which is wrought in the soul not by the ordinance of baptism (as so many erroneously imagine), but by the Spirit's application of the Word of God. This is made abundantly plain in 1 Peter 1: 23; James 1: 18; while Eph. 5: 26 is a sufficient authority for regarding water as an emblem of the Word. Every soul thus new-born finds himself in moral separation from the whole order of things around him. Holy, heavenly aspirations fill his breast, while sin in its every form becomes his deep abhorrence. But though he has been thus morally purified in the very depths of his being, the Christian still needs the cleansing action of the Word of God from day to day. Christ's company is defined as "His own that are in the world." They are to have part with Him in the Father's house for ever, and it is His will that they should have part with Him in the way of spiritual communion now. But for this there must be an undefiled walk through this evil world. Since it is practically impossible to handle the things of life, and to have contact with the ungodly without having the spirit soiled, He from His exalted place on high (acting in conjunction with the Holy Spirit below) applies from time to time His precious Word to us all for our blessing. "If I wash thee not thou hast no part with Me." We should indeed wash one another's feet, i.e., we should in

watchful love, bring Scripture to bear upon one another's lives; but beyond all that man can do for his fellow there remains the Saviour's own ministry of grace. His vigilant eye cannot fail to perceive soil that would escape all human notice.

Peter's strenuous protests thus elicited for the saints of all times a most valuable unfolding of divine grace. Let us beware of introducing a cleansing by blood into John 13. No such thought is there. The atoning blood of Christ and its marvellous effects is fully dealt with in Heb. 9-10, but not in John 13. Every Christian has experienced the total washing of the new birth, and in virtue thereof is "clean every whit" he has also had applied to his soul the efficacy of the blood, and is in consequence "perfected for ever" (Heb. 10: 14); but over and above all this there is the Saviour's gracious daily washing of the feet, or in other words, His continual application of His holy Word for the correction of all that may need correcting in our practical walk and ways.

"Lord, Who is it?"

It was the last evening, and the Saviour was sitting at the supper table with the twelve. The paschal lamb was upon the dish, that ancient type which was to be fulfilled in Himself upon the morrow as the Lamb of God slain for the life of the world. He had just given the disciples a touching proof of His changeless love to them in washing their feet. Then a wave of sorrow passed over His spirit, and He said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me" (John 13: 21). The sting lay in the words "one of you." It was painful enough to be scorned by men generally, but that one of the privileged few whom He had admitted to daily intimacy with Himself should deliver Him up to His enemies was heart-rending indeed. But what evil is the human heart not capable of?

Eleven at least of those at the table were simplicity itself as to the matter. Not doubting the truth of the Saviour's words, and not over-confident as to their own fidelity, they asked Him one by one, "Lord, is it I?" Matthew and Mark both record their question, the latter adding that "they began to be sorrowful," the former telling us "very sorrowful."

Peter, with his usual keenness, was anxious to go further than this. His special friend John was nearest to the Lord at that moment - "in His bosom" indeed. Peter therefore beckoned to him to question the Saviour more directly. The nearer we are to Christ in our souls' consciousness the more likely we are to learn His mind at any time. John then, from his place in His bosom, asked, "Lord, who is it?" The reply was: "He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it." This act was a known mark of special affection. The sop was forthwith dipped, and handed to Judas. Only in the fourth Gospel have we John's inquiry, as suggested by Peter, but Matthew records that Judas himself was shameless enough to ask, "Is it I?" He was answered in the affirmative (Matt. 26: 25).

Judas furnishes us with a character study of the most awful kind. Few men who have ever lived have sinned so grievously. One of the privileged twelve, treasurer of the band, his feet washed by the Son of God, granted the morsel from the dish, yet for a few pieces of silver, (the amount of compensation for a slave gored by a bull — Ex. 21: 32) he sold his Master to His murderers. Love of money was his ruin. So effectually did it steel his heart that the Saviour's most touching overtures were unable to reach him. Christians are warned in tremendous language against this most subtle of all snares in 1 Tim. 6: 10-12. Fools are we if we refuse to heed the admonition.

Judas could, after all, only accomplish the purpose of God, and this the Saviour pointed out, in words preserved for us by Matthew and Mark. "The Son of man goeth as it is written of Him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been

born." It is an immense stay to the heart of the believer to know that neither the wickedness of man, nor the machinations of Satan can frustrate any divine counsel. Rebels against their Maker, whether human or angelic, are indeed constrained, in spite of themselves, to contribute to the final result as planned by Him. This does not, of course, lessen their wickedness in the smallest degree, God and His purposes having no place whatever in their thoughts.

It is a significant fact that while John and his companions addressed the Saviour as "Lord," the betrayer called Him "Rabbi" only (Matt. 26: 25, R.V.). There is no recorded instance of Judas ever giving Him the higher title. To truly acknowledge Jesus as Lord is the fruit of a work of the Holy Spirit within (1 Cor. 12: 3). That is, of course during this period of His rejection. But the day will come when God will constrain every knee to bow to Him, and every tongue — heavenly, earthly, and infernal — will confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2: 10-11). But in this there is no salvation. It is simply the compulsory recognition of the rights and title of the Crucified.

"Whither goest Thou?"

The Lord and the eleven were still seated at the supper table. Judas was now away from them, completing his arrangements for his terrible crime. All the results of Calvary rose up before the Saviour's mind. God was to be glorified thereby as otherwise He could not possibly be, and He would respond to the achievement of the holy Sufferer by immediately glorifying Him in Himself above (John 13: 31-32). The Saviour thus clearly predicted His own resurrection and ascension. But He added: "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek Me: and as I said unto the Jews, 'Whither I go, ye cannot come'; so now I say to you." This announcement once more drew forth our apostle. "Lord, whither goest Thou?" To this Peter was told in reply: "Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterwards" (John 13: 36-38). His ultimate destination was the Father's house on high, as the next chapter clearly shows; but He was going thither by way of death. Death, not as the saint knows it, which is after all but sleep, but death as the judgement of God against sin. As the sacred ark went down first into the Jordan in Joshua's day, so, in like manner, He of whom the ark was a feeble type, must go down first into death, and rob it of its sting by making atonement for sin and guilt, ere Peter or any other could follow in His steps.

The victory of Christ has altered the whole aspect of death for His believing people. No longer is it to us "the king of terrors" (Job 18: 14); on the contrary, death is ours, the exulting apostle tells us in 1 Cor. 3: 21-22; that is to say, it is a servant to serve for our blessing. Old Testament believers were "through fear of death all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2: 15). Who can fail to perceive the difference between the days when Christ's victory was a matter of expectation and hope, and our own privileged time when His glorious triumph is an accomplished fact?

Peter should have been content with the Saviour's reply, for it not only told him of the impossibility of following Him just then, it also gave him the gracious assurance that he should follow afterwards. This was the Saviour's first hint to Peter that the honour of martyrdom was ultimately to be his portion.

But the ardent apostle must needs push his inquiries further. "Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake." Pitiful self-confidence, in which all his companions joined, as reference to the other Gospels proves. His humiliating fall must needs be disclosed now. Accordingly, the Lord answered him: "Wilt thou lay down thy life for My sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow till thou hast denied Me thrice." Poor Peter! Ere he could rightly enter upon his life-work for the Master he sincerely loved, he must learn the bitterest lesson men are

called to sit down to in this world. He must learn the utter good for-nothingness of flesh, even in the most favoured. He might indeed have gathered all that was necessary from the Saviour's lips, but heart and conscience not being thoroughly searched thus, he must be put into the sieve of Satan. From his fiendish hand Peter came forth humbled and broken, henceforward a powerful exponent of the wonderful grace which forgives the most unworthy.

Gethsemane.

The Saviour and His disciples sang a hymn before leaving the supper table — so Matthew and Mark inform us. This was probably the great Hallel, consisting of Psalms 115-118. Wonderful words to come from His lips at such a moment! "The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner" (Ps. 118: 22) - Himself the rejected of earth about to be glorified on high. "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar" (v. 27) — Himself as the sacrificial victim about to be slain for the sin of the world.

Presently, like rejected David of old, the Saviour crossed the Kidron, and approached the Mount of Olives (2 Sam. 15: 23-30). On the way thither, Peter and his companions renewed their pledge of devotion unto death. So we gather from Matthew (Matt. 26: 30-35) and Mark (Mark 4: 26-31). Upon the slope of Olivet was the garden of Gethsemane — a spot well-known to the betrayer as one of the Saviour's quiet resorts (John 18: 2). We do not propose to deal with all that transpired on that dreadful night, but will confine ourselves to the part played by our apostle.

Eight of the disciples were left near the entrance, while the Saviour, with Peter, James and John, went deeper into the recesses of the garden. For this detail we are again indebted to Matthew and Mark. This was the third occasion on which these men were specially favoured by the Lord Jesus, the other occasions being the raising of Jairus' daughter, and the Transfiguration. But presently He left even these three, saying; "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with Me." Returning after a while from His lonely agony, He found them asleep, so little did their dull hearts realize what was coming upon their Master. His rebuke — unspeakably gentle - was addressed to Peter as the one who boasted the loudest. "What, could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray (for themselves, not for Him), that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." This happened three times. That is, three times the Saviour went apart and prayed, and three times He found the disciples asleep when He returned to them. In the presence of such a fact, who among us dare boast of anything? How feeble is the devotion of even the truest-hearted believer!

Judas then approached, with a band of armed men. As he covered his Master with his false kisses, the disciples, perceiving that mischief was intended, asked, "Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" (Luke 22: 49). Before the Saviour could reply, fiery Peter struck a blow at Malchus, one of the servants of the high priest, and cut off his right ear (probably intending to cleave his skull). It is John who records the names in this instance (John 18: 10). Luke tells us that the Saviour touched the sufferer's ear, and healed him (Luke 22: 51), an incident that would be specially interesting to "the beloved physician" (Col. 4: 14). But the carnal courage of Peter and the rest soon failed them, for they all forsook Him and fled. The contrast is complete between the Son of God and every other, even the most distinguished. He, perfectly submissive under the Father's hand: they, hasty and violent. He, divinely strengthened to suffer His will, even unto death; they, cowardly when the danger developed. He, understanding all that would result from His cross and shame; they, foolishly unintelligent as to all that He had told them concerning it. (Luke 24: 25-27, 44) Truly, in the last dreadful scenes none shone but He. In no one but the Son of His love was the Father glorified.

The Threefold Denial.

Had anyone told Peter on the day of his enthusiastic confession of his Master as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” that the moment would come when he would repudiate Him with oaths and curses, he would have been disposed to reply, in the words of another: “What, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” (2 Kings 8: 13). But he did it nevertheless; and all the Evangelists record the humiliating story, even John, Peter's special friend and companion, entering into the details of it as carefully as the rest.

It was first a simple denial, in answer to the challenge of the maid who kept the High-Priest's door (Matt. 26: 69-70). In answer to the questions of several in the porch, he added an oath to his second denial. Then, being identified by a relative of the man whose ear he cut off in the garden (John 18: 26), he broke out into a regular volley of oaths and curses. “I know not this man of whom ye speak” (Mark 14: 71). The first two Evangelists only record the cursing and swearing; Luke and John content themselves with the fact of the denial.

Surely the Spirit of God had His reasons for giving us a fourfold account of Peter's miserable fall. It is an abiding warning against self-sufficiency in any of us. “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” (1 Cor. 10: 12). What Peter did yesterday, both reader and writer may do to-morrow, unless upheld by infinite grace. The absolute unreliability of flesh, i.e., of human nature, stands out vividly in the story of Peter's denial of his Lord. In all that he vowed beforehand his spirit was indeed willing, the Lord Himself acknowledging it (Matt. 26: 41). Yet, when the test came, he found himself as weak “as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again” (2 Sam. 14: 14). In the presence of armed men in Gethsemane where there seemed to be real danger. Peter was bold enough; but in the presence of servant maids later, where there does not appear to have been any danger at all, Peter was cowardice personified. John was with him when he was questioned as to his association with Jesus of Nazareth, and was apparently in no peril (John 18: 15-16); how then could there have been any real cause for alarm for his friend?

Moses failed in somewhat the same way. First, so eager for the deliverance of Israel from Egypt that he used carnal violence in order to attain his end; then, when God's time really came for the great work, his diffidence was such that “the anger of Jehovah was kindled against him” (Ex. 2: 11-12; Ex. 4: 14). How few, even of the best, know precisely the time to speak and act, and the time to be silent and passive! There has been but One in this world who has perfectly glorified His Father and God. In every other the failure has been painfully apparent. And so the noble witness of Matt. 16: 16 and John 6: 68-69 is shown to us cursing and swearing in the High Priest's servants' hall, vehemently affirming that he had no knowledge whatever of Jesus of Nazareth! Well might the apostle James say: “Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (James 3: 10). But even so, Peter's case was not hopeless. His injured Lord, in the midst of His own distress, thought of His poor servant, thus being driven along by the enemy as a fallen leaf, “and the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.” We are indebted to Luke for this exquisite expression of divine grace (Luke 22, 61). The look was enough. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record that the sinning apostle went out and wept; Matthew and Luke adding “bitterly.” In this we perceive the fundamental difference between Peter and Judas. The latter was goaded on by Satan to suicide, the former, susceptible to divine influences, ended with tears. Judas was a mere professor from the beginning; Peter was a man “born anew” by the Holy Spirit (John 3: 3).

What infinite mercy that salvation is not of works! Else, where would any of us stand? “It is of faith, that it might be by grace” (Rom. 4: 16). The basis of blessing for sinful men is the Saviour's

atonement blood. To this no merit can be added; and from it nothing can detract, not even the failure of one so eminent as Simon Peter.

At the Sepulchre.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a mere spiritual idea, but a physical fact of the highest possible importance. It is indeed the keystone of the arch of Christianity. If the resurrection of Christ could be disproved, then both preaching and faith are vain. Happily, no uncertainty whatever exists as to the mighty fact.

None of the disciples were expecting their Lord to rise from the dead on the third day. Though He repeatedly foretold His passion and resurrection, their dull hearts did not appear to apprehend His meaning. Hence the cross and the empty tomb were equally surprises to them. The fact is they were so deeply imbued with the teaching of the Old Testament prophets that their hope in Christ did not go beyond an earthly kingdom. Of blessing of another order and in another scene they had no real idea. The cross necessarily killed their expectations of the kingdom, as the sorrowful travellers to Emmaus candidly acknowledged in Luke 24: 21. They had yet to learn that the kingdom was certain, if deferred, and that meanwhile, on the basis of Christ's atoning death, heavenly blessing was to be the portion of His believing people.

The Lord rose very early on the morning of the first day of the week (Matt. 28: 1). When certain devoted women approached with their spices, they found the sepulchre open, with angels in attendance. Their Lord was risen. By His death He had settled the sin question, and had now come forth from the tomb in resurrection power, the might of Satan being thus overthrown. "Fear not ye" was the word to the terrified women. They were charged with a gracious message to the disciples, to which Mark adds a particularly beautiful detail. "Tell His disciples, and Peter, that He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him" (Mark 16: 7). Why "and Peter"? Oh, the grace of it! Had the message been general to the disciples, poor cursing Peter would scarcely have dared to claim a part therein. But the touching addition, "and Peter," assured his heart that, notwithstanding his terrible fall, his Lord acknowledged him still.

Peter forthwith ran to the sepulchre, John accompanying him (John 20: 2-10). "The other disciple did outrun Peter and came first to the sepulchre." Why was this? There is nothing like love to quicken the steps, and there is nothing like a heavy heart to clog them. He who lay in the bosom of Jesus would necessarily travel faster than his backsliding friend. But Peter, ever impulsive, went into the sepulchre first. When John and he saw the linen clothes wrapped in an orderly way, but no dead body, they went away to their own home. If their Lord was not there the tomb had no further interest for them.

Mary Magdalene, however, could not take things so. With Jesus missing, the world was an utter blank to her heart. Accordingly she lingered at the spot, and presently was favoured with a sight of the Lord Himself, which brought her to His feet in adoration. If she lacked intelligence in shedding tears on the day of all others in the history of the universe when God's people should have rejoiced, she was not deficient in affection. This the Lord ever values above everything else in His people. There is, indeed, no substitute for love.

As the great day wore on, the Lord Jesus showed Himself to various of His own, and amongst others, to Simon Peter (Luke 24: 34) What passed between the Lord and His erring servant at this private interview we know not, but it unquestionably marked an important step in his restoration, which was so happily completed by the Sea of Tiberias.

“Lovest Thou Me?”

The time had now come for Peter to be restored not only to communion with the Lord, but also to His service. The spot chosen for this was the Galilean Sea, on the shore of which Peter and others first heard the Saviour's call to leave all and follow Him. John 21 thus becomes the complement to Luke 5.

On the last journey to Jerusalem the Saviour charged the disciples to meet Him in Galilee after His resurrection. They were reminded of His words by the angels at the sepulchre (Matt. 26: 32: 28: 7). Yet, when they reached the North, instead of quietly waiting for the Lord, seven of them went fishing, Simon Peter being the leader of this departure. Their night's labour yielded nothing, for what blessing can disobedient ones expect from God? At dawn a stranger on the shore challenged them as to their condition; and presently, at His command, they let down their net once more, and this time “they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.” John said to Peter: — “It is the Lord.” Instantly the impulsive Peter put on his coat, and flung himself into the sea in order to hasten to His feet.

Very beautiful is this! Even after his shameful denial of his Lord, the apostle felt nowhere so happy as in His presence. If human love had broken down, the offender knew perfectly that divine love was still the same. Let every believer find comfort in the thought!

When the weary fishermen reached the shore that morning they found “a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.” A divinely provided breakfast for disobedient disciples! We are reminded of Elijah in 1 Kings 19. When the prophet was right with God, ravens sufficed as messengers for his need; when he was downcast and erring an angel was commissioned to minister to him. Well has the poet said, “To those who fall, how kind Thou art!” Not a word of remonstrance did the Saviour address either to Peter or to his companions until He had first refreshed them with His bounty. Oh, the gulf that separates this gracious One from even the best of His people!

“When they had dined,” the questioning began. It was a warmed and filled Peter that was interrogated that day. “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?” The Lord thus suitably revived his old natural name, for his conduct of late had been unworthy of his new standing in grace. “More than these?” How the question would strike home, seeing that Peter had so vehemently affirmed, “Although all shall be offended, yet will not I” (Mark 14: 29). The apostle could but reply, “Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee.” Never again could he say, “More than these”; his self-sufficiency was humbled and broken. There are two words for “love” in the Greek of this passage. The Lord employed the word indicative of general affection; Peter in his reply gave utterance to a stronger term, one of special affection, meaning “I dearly love.” Forthwith the Lord said: “Feed My lambs.” Presently He challenged the apostle in a milder way — “Lovest thou Me?” dropping the words “more than these.” Peter replying as before, He said “Feed My sheep.” Then the Lord demanded a third time, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?” this time using Peter's own word of special affection. This completely broke down the apostle, who could now but cast himself upon the Master's omniscience: “Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee.” It was a frank confession that those who had read his life of late could not have gathered from it that Christ was aught to him; but that, nevertheless, at the bottom of his heart there was a true appreciation of His priceless worth. Once more the Saviour said: “Feed My sheep,” adding the assurance that though by His unfaithfulness he had missed the honour of dying with Him, the privilege of martyrdom should be granted him in a later day.

We mark three steps in the Lord's restoration of Peter: His prayer, His look and His word (Luke 22: 32-61; Luke 24: 34; John 21: 15-19). Thus reinstated in His Master's confidence, and once more granted a commission in His service, Peter was ready, when the Holy Spirit came down from heaven, to act his own special part in the great enterprise of grace that we call Christianity. No man is

competent to serve our Lord Jesus Christ who has not trodden Peter's path. First, born anew by the quickening agency of God's blessed Spirit, his sins forgiven in virtue of the Saviour's atoning blood, and his self-confidence shattered that henceforward no power may operate within him but that of the divine Spirit.

After the Ascension.

During forty days the disciples had the company of the Lord Jesus after His resurrection, and before He ascended up on high. Then came the day when He led them out from Jerusalem as far as to Bethany (a village on the Eastern declivity of the Mount of Olives), and He was parted from them while in the very act of blessing them (Luke 24: 51) . They had just asked Him if the kingdom was now to be restored to Israel, and were told in reply that the Father reserved to Himself all times and seasons. Meanwhile they were to be witnesses for Christ in Jerusalem, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

Then he ascended, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. It was a visible bodily ascension, and the glorified One now sits as Man at the right hand of God. As the disciples strained their eyes upward, two men in white apparel assured them that the same Jesus whom they had seen go into heaven should come again in like manner (Acts 1: 9-11). There is thus to be a visible bodily return of the Lord Jesus. Every hour brings the great event nearer. With this wonderful prospect before them, the bereaved disciples returned to Jerusalem filled with rejoicing. The next thing was the coming of the Holy Spirit, as the gift of the ascended Christ, and for this they had to wait ten days. This period they spent in prayer in an upper room in Jerusalem, the mother and brethren of Jesus uniting with them (Acts 1: 13-14). This is the last notice of Mary in Holy Scripture. After the inauguration of Christianity on the day of Pentecost we never hear of her. Thus our last acquaintance with her is not as being prayed to, as if she had some special influence with heaven, but as a praying one herself amongst other praying ones. Let this fact be carefully noted. It may save us from superstitious notions concerning this highly favoured woman.

On one of those days of prayer Peter rose up and addressed the brethren concerning the vacancy created by the defection and suicide of Judas (Acts 1: 15-26). The Lord before His departure had "opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures." Accordingly Peter quoted two verses from the book of Psalms (Ps. 69: 25; Ps. 109: 8), both having reference to the betrayer. Since Psalm 109: 8 said "his office let another take," our apostle urged that one from amongst those who had companied with them "all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out amongst" them should be formally added to their number as a witness with them of His resurrection. Two persons answering to these qualifications were selected — Joseph Barsabas and Matthias. They then gave themselves to prayer, after which they gave forth their lots, that the departed Lord might in this way signify which of the two He had chosen. "And the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

Perhaps no act has been so seriously misunderstood as this, especially amongst Protestant Nonconformists, It is supposed that scriptural warrant is here found for the election of some to the ministerial office. The fact seems to have been overlooked that the incident occurred before Christianity commenced at all. Christianity dates not from the birth of Christ, but from the coming of the Holy Spirit. Matthias was thus chosen in connection with the Jewish order of things, for of the Church of God neither Peter nor his companions had the most distant idea at that time. The truth concerning the Church remained a mystery (i.e., a secret) hidden in God until Paul was called by the Lord Jesus some years later (Eph. 3: 3-6). The ten days that intervened between the ascension of Christ

and the coming of the Holy Spirit were thus a kind of interregnum in the spiritual history of the disciples. The one divine Person had gone and the Other had not yet come. Nothing that savours of popular election to the ministerial office can be discovered in the Scripture records of the early Church. When the distribution of money was in question, the body of the believers were authorised to choose their almoners (Acts 6: 3; 2 Cor. 8: 19); when the ministry of the Word was in view, they had no voice whatever. Why this difference? Because the money was their gift, while the ministry of the Word of God is the gift of the Lord alone. It is undeniable that Paul gloried in the fact that man was neither the source of his commission nor the channel by means of which he received it (Gal. 1: 1).

The Pentecostal Sermon.

A wonderful event took place on the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection, and ten after the ascension, of the Lord Jesus — the Holy Spirit of God came down from heaven to take up His residence here with the redeemed during the entire period of the Saviour's absence. It was not a mere exertion of divine influence for the good of men, but it was the coming of a divine Person. Christianity is thus a signally favoured period. But what is the Spirit of God here to do? To watch over the interests of the rejected Christ, and to gather out from amongst men, by means of the Gospel, those who are to be Christ's brethren and joint heirs for ever. Further, His presence on earth has created a unity amongst the redeemed which was impossible prior to His coming. All the saved are constituted members of Christ's body, and living stones in God's new and spiritual house.

Our business just now is with Peter's part on that memorable Pentecostal day. One of the immediate results of the Holy Spirit's coming was that all the disciples began to proclaim in other tongues the wonderful works of God. Jerusalem was at that time crowded with Jews from many countries who had gathered up for the great religious festival, and these were astounded to hear simple Galileans beginning to speak in at least sixteen foreign tongues. Some inquired: "What meaneth this?" Others mocking said, "These men are full of new wine" (Acts 2).

Then Peter arose, the eleven apostles being by his side, and addressed the multitude. He first rebutted the charge of drunkenness by drawing attention to the early hour. It was but 9 a.m. He then cited five verses from Joel 2 relative to the outpouring of the Spirit in the last days; and, while not affirming that the prophecy was then being fulfilled, he sought to show that it was something of the same nature which had that day taken place in Jerusalem. He next turned to the question of Jesus, and spoke of the wonderful facts of His life on earth, and how the Jewish people had crucified and slain Him by the hands of lawless Romans. But God had intervened by His power, and raised Him up from amongst the dead, and exalted Him to His own right hand. It was from the ascended Jesus the Holy Spirit had come down. The aim of Peter's discourse was to show that God and men were at utter variance concerning Jesus. Men had crucified Him, but God had glorified Him. Earth had rejected Him, but heaven had welcomed Him. A truly awful position for men to find themselves in relation to their God.

This Pentecostal address, being the first Christian sermon, is worthy of our most careful attention. It contained no pretension to great learning, it left untouched all the social and political questions which so fascinate the minds of men, and it dealt exclusively with the hearts and consciences of the hearers as to a Person Jesus. Its forceful language was full of Scripture; not only Joel 2, but also Psalms 16, and 110 being pressed into service. Why should the time of congregations in our own day ever be wasted with discourses of any other character? This, and this only, is the kind of preaching that is mighty through God for the blessing of the souls of men.

The effect of Peter's words was wonderful. Multitudes were broken under it. Realising how terribly they had compromised themselves with God by their rejection of His Son, they said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles: "Brethren, what shall we do?" The answer was as follows: "Repent, and be baptised everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Baptism before remission! This is not God's usual order, but the very reverse. When Peter proclaimed Jesus to Cornelius and his friends, they first received the remission of their sins, then the Holy Spirit, and after that baptism was granted them (Acts 10: 43-48). The usual order was departed from on the Day of Pentecost for a very important reason. Only seven weeks earlier these people had been guilty of the murder of the Son of God. They were now horrified at their sin. But under the exceptional circumstances they were not permitted to receive, either the remission of their sins or the gift of the Holy Spirit until they had been baptised in the name of the very One they had so violently rejected. Three thousand submitted to these humiliating terms, and thus signified the reality of their repentance. Their baptism put them entirely outside "the untoward generation" upon whom the vengeance of God was about to fall by the hand of the Romans.

What a day's work! Three thousand souls won for the rejected Christ! Yet larger blessing was hinted at in Peter's closing words: "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2: 39). Such words are all-embracing. Gentile sinners such as we have part in them. Happy is the man who has heard the Gospel call, and in faith submitted himself to the once-crucified Saviour and Lord.

Healing the Cripple.

The effects of the Spirit's descent from heaven soon became apparent. Not only was a divine unity formed amongst the people of God, which found expression in steadfast continuance in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, and in the breaking of bread and in prayers (Acts 2: 42), but signs and wonders began to be wrought in the name of the Lord Jesus. The first of these was the healing of the cripple at the Beautiful gate of the temple, as recorded in Acts 3.

Peter and John, yoke-fellows for some years in the Lord's work, as formerly partners in trade, went up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour, i.e., 3 p.m. This was the moment when the evening sacrifice was offered in the temple court, and when the incense was burnt at the golden altar within the house. Both sacrifice and incense when first appointed by God spoke to His heart of the Christ who should come. In the day of Acts 3 these things had become meaningless, all having been accomplished in Him who had now gone up on high. In our own day (after centuries of Gospel light) sacrifice and incense are worse than meaningless. They are a positive insult to Christ and His cross. The hour of the evening sacrifice was the time of the Saviour's death; it is suggestive indeed that the cripple was blessed just then. Surely this fact whispers to us that all blessing for man is founded upon His atonement. Other instances of divine interposition at the same hour may be found in 1 Kings 18: 36; Ezra 9: 5; Dan. 9: 21; Acts 10: 3. When God thus condescends to draw attention to the clock there is instruction intended, if only we have ears to hear.

As Peter and John approached the temple gate that day, a man lame from his birth, who took his station there daily, begged money of them. Instead of pence he obtained healing. In reply to his begging appeal, Peter said: "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." The next moment the poor fellow was walking, and leaping, and praising God — such was the potency of the name of the rejected Jesus.

Those were blessed days when the Church, possessed of no human patronage or worldly

endowments, and when its foremost preacher had to say, "Silver and gold have I none," carried on all its operations in simple faith in the name of Jesus, and in the realization of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Why was such a condition of things ever allowed to pass away? In those days penniless men "turned the world upside down," their enemies themselves being witnesses (Acts 17: 6); in these days ecclesiastical princes with limitless wealth at their command are well nigh impotent in the presence of the enemy. Such a fact should lead to great searching of heart amongst us. Something is terribly wrong in the principles and methods of our time!

The cripple of Acts 3 was a remarkable picture of his nation. For fifteen centuries Israel had been in closest proximity to God's house, but beyond the gate thereof none had ever gone. Worship within the veil, the precious privilege now of every believer in Jesus, was altogether unknown to them (Heb. 10: 19). Why? Because of the ground on which they stood with God - that of law. At Sinai and after, Israel vowed to keep all God's holy requirements, but their awful failures only proved that spiritually, as the cripple of our chapter physically, man is lame from his mother's womb. It is a great lesson to learn our lameness — our utter inability to do anything for God. Grace alone suits lame ones. He who gives up all pretensions to goodness of his own, and trusts in the name of the Crucified, finds salvation therein, as surely as the cripple of our chapter found healing. Spiritual activity soon follows — "walking, and leaping, and praising God." It is in vain to bid a man walk with God and keep His word until he has proved for himself His matchless grace; equally in vain is it to expect praise from the lips of those who are "doing" for salvation. On which line is both reader and writer, grace or law, our own works or Christ's work finished once for all? "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt And if by grace, then it is no longer of works: otherwise grace is no longer grace" (Rom. 4: 4; 11: 6).

In Solomon's Porch.

The healing of so well-known a character as the lame beggar soon drew together a multitude in Solomon's porch. This was a covered walk with pillars, much frequented by visitors to the temple. It was here that the Jews told out their unbelief so painfully in the days of the Lord Jesus, when they said: "How long dost Thou make us to doubt? If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." When He did declare plainly the truth as to His person they forthwith attempted His life (John 10: 22-29).

The crowd which gathered round Peter and John furnished the opportunity for the second recorded Christian sermon (Acts 3: 12-26). It was remarkable in various ways. First, Peter sought to divert attention from himself and his companions by insisting that it was not by their own power or holiness they had made the man to walk; but that instead the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had wrought for the glory of His servant Jesus, whom the Jewish people had so recently denied and slain. The apostle put their guilty deed in the strongest form when he said: "Ye denied the holy One, and the just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince (or Author) of life, whom God hath raised from the dead." They had deliberately preferred a taker of life, in the person of Barabbas, to the divine Author of life — the Son of God! Now it was His name, through faith in His name, which had given the poor cripple perfect soundness in the presence of them all. What an awful position for men to find themselves in! God was publicly honouring the name of the One they had murdered! God and man were thus at open variance concerning Jesus. The position has not altered to this hour. The world has not changed its mind as to the Crucified; were it otherwise, it would cease to be "the world." The world ever despises and hates Him whom God loves and magnifies.

Peter added: "And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your

rulers." Marvellous grace this! To our poor minds it would seem as if the awful sin was committed with open eyes! Peter took the same line as his Master when He said: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23: 34). Under the law Jehovah drew a distinction between a man-slayer and a murderer. For the latter there was to be no mercy; for the former there was safety in the cities of refuge (Num. 35). God is graciously pleased to regard Israel — the slayer of Jesus — as a man-slayer. Accordingly there is still mercy for that blood-stained nation.

A very remarkable overture was made to Israel that day in Solomon's porch. In Acts 2 Peter's appeal was to individuals and those who responded to it became forthwith detached from "this untoward generation"; in Acts 3 the same preacher's appeal was to the nation as such. He called upon the people to repent and be converted, promising them that in that case their sins should be blotted out, and that times of refreshing should come from the presence of Jehovah. Moreover God would send back Jesus. The heavens had received Him until the times of the restitution of all things; it now remained for Israel to say whether that time of universal blessing should commence forthwith. Let us note carefully that the world's blessing awaits Israel's repentance. While that nation continues in unbelief Jesus remains in the heavens, and the evil sway of the devil goes on.

Before the people could reply, Peter added a warning based upon Deut. 18: 15-19. Moses had predicted the coming of a prophet — man like himself, to whom the nation must hearken on pain of destruction. This prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus; who, though the Eternal Son, condescended to become Man in our midst — as truly human as Moses or any other. No mere expounder of Moses' law was He, but proclaimer of a new and more glorious order of things altogether. This is shown in the words: "Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you." All the prophets from Samuel onward had pointed to This day. Israel had been privileged indeed, to have first the prophets in long succession, and finally the Son of God Himself speaking in their midst. And now, in spite of their slaughter of Him, it was divinely proposed to give Him to them a second time; and thus blessing — full and final — should be brought in, not for Israel only, but for all the nations of the earth. Alas, for the hopeless evil of the human heart! The gracious overture was spurned with the result that the world drags on century by century in its weary way, feeling ever more deeply its need of peace and rest, yet never attaining thereunto. The rejected Jesus is men's only true hope, could they but see it.

"You Builders."

While Peter and John yet reasoned with the people concerning Jesus, the ecclesiastical authorities came down upon them in wrath. From Acts 4: 1 we learn that the Sadducees were now in power amongst the Jewish hierarchy. These men — the Higher Critics and the Rationalists of that day — were specially enraged that Peter and John should preach through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. They had made it their sorry business to eliminate from the minds of the people all faith in the miraculous. Accordingly the preachers were lodged in gaol for the night, but not until many of their audience had believed the glad tidings concerning the Saviour.

We continue with Acts 4. In the morning a goodly number of Israel's religious chiefs assembled together in Jerusalem, and having set Peter and John in the midst, they demanded of them by what power or by what name they had made the lame man whole. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit in accordance with the Lord's promise in Matt. 10: 19-20, no longer timorous but divinely bold, forthwith indicted his interlocutors most solemnly. To the people he used the language of persuasion, but not to the leaders. It was in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, "whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead," the crippled man had been made whole. The position is here plainly stated. Men crucified

Jesus; God raised Him. Men were thus in open conflict with God. Not ignorant men, mark; but the clergy of God's people, the public expositors of His holy Word. Further, Peter said: "This is the Stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." Religious teachers, whether in Judaism or in Christendom, are builders; constructors of that which will either abide or perish, as the Lord may judge by and by (1 Cor. 3: 9-17). God's foundation stone is Jesus; upon Him alone can men safely build. But Israel's leaders had treated Him with contempt. God's answer to them was the exaltation of His Son. God has now made Him the Corner-stone of a new structure; the office of Peter's antagonists was therefore gone, however fiercely they might contend for it. Our apostle made a magnificent finish of his defence: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Every man is thus shut up to Jesus for salvation. He who rejects Him does so to his eternal ruin.

The Jewish ecclesiastics were amazed at being thus addressed by "unlearned and ignorant men" such as Peter and John "Unlearned and ignorant" does not mean "without education"; the point is that they had received no specific training for public work. In modern language, they were not university men, But these humble preachers had what was immeasurably better; they had heart-knowledge of God and His Son, and were withal indwelt by the Holy Spirit. They were put outside the council while their judges conferred together as to the best method of dealing with them.

What shall we do to these men," said they, "for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it." They would have denied it if possible, even as they had shamelessly circulated lies concerning what happened at the Saviour's tomb. They agreed amongst themselves to charge the apostles to speak no more in the name of Jesus. When Peter and John were called in, and admonished thus, they gave the only answer that was possible under the circumstances. "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." Solemn words, indicating as they do that God was no longer with these ecclesiastics, but with the humble men whom they despised. These latter were aflame in their souls with divine facts concerning the Lord Jesus, the potency of which for the salvation of men they deeply realized; they were not to be silenced therefore by the threats of their antagonists.

How often has this scene been reproduced in Christendom! God's true servants despised and persecuted by professional shepherds of God's people, themselves destitute of any true knowledge of God, while contending fiercely for the empty shell of the religious system from which they have derived all their importance. Utterly incompetent themselves to convey true blessing to men's souls, they have raged against those whom God has been pleased to use for this purpose. So far as the times have permitted, all the force of the world's governments has been invoked against them for the satisfaction of wounded ecclesiastical pride.

That memorable day in Jerusalem ended with a remarkable prayer meeting (Acts 4: 23-31). Being let go, Peter and John went to their own company, and reported all that had passed between themselves and the chief priests and elders. The assembly at once turned to God with one accord; and when they had prayed, God gave open proof of His presence amongst them by shaking the place where they were assembled together. "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spake the word of God with boldness."

Ananias and Sapphira.

A great wave of devotedness was passing over the infant Church in Jerusalem. Under the mighty

impulse of divine grace earthly things were being held with a very loose hand. Property was freely surrendered (Barnabas being conspicuous in this,) and the proceeds were being laid at the feet of the apostles that all might share together (Acts 4: 32-37). Did the Lord demand this of His people? Most assuredly not, for Christianity is characterised by grace, and God has taken the place of the Giver. But He values what His people voluntarily surrender, because it indicates appreciation of what He has wrought for them through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Such a communistic condition of things as obtained in the early Church was only possible while the Church was confined to one city. But liberal-heartedness is always pleasant in the divine sight. Alas, that it should be one of the rarest of Christian graces!

Amongst those who brought to the apostles the proceeds of property sold were Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5: 1-11). These brought part only of the sum realized. This would have been doubtless acceptable enough both to God and to the apostles had they been open and frank about it. But the evil pair agreed together to represent the amount as the whole, and in so doing they became guilty of a grievous sin. They wished apparently to be regarded by their brethren as devoted and unworldly, like Barnabas and many others. How often has human opinion ensnared men's souls! Ananias, who tendered the money, was promptly challenged by Peter: "Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?" There lay the enormity of the sin. God the Holy Spirit had come from heaven to make the Church His temple (1 Cor. 3: 16). As surely as God filled both the tabernacle and the temple with the Shekinah — the visible token of His presence amongst His people Israel — so now in this more favoured age God has granted His Spirit from on high, first to form the Church, and then to inhabit it during the entire absence of the Lord in heaven. Ananias and his wife ignored this mighty fact, even as multitudes who profess and call themselves Christians do to-day. But just as Jehovah resented the affront of Nadab and Abihu in the opening days of the Israel age (Lev. 10), so in like manner He resented the affront of Ananias and Sapphira in the opening days of the Church era, and this for the warning of the people of God unto the end.

As Ananias listened to the apostle he fell dead at his feet. The young men having buried him, his wife, who had not heard of what had transpired, came in. Peter then challenged her also: "Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?" She replying in the affirmative, Peter said: "How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out." To "tempt the Spirit of the Lord" is to question His presence in the midst of God's people Israel was guilty of this sin at Meribah (Ex. 17: 7). The woman fell down dead immediately, and she was presently buried beside her husband.

Were Ananias and Sapphira converted souls? None can say. Certainly the Lord at a later date felt constrained to lay His disciplinary hand upon some of the ill behaved Corinthian brethren. They were indeed "washed, sanctified, and justified," but such was their conduct that some were weak and sickly amongst them, and many slept. 1 Cor. 6: 11 shows that they were fit for heaven, but 1 Cor. 11: 20-32 makes it sadly plain that they were not fit for Corinth. The lesson of Acts 5 is that holiness becomes God's house for ever. (Ps. 93: 5).

"Great fear came upon all the Church and upon as many as heard these things." Moreover, we read: "Of the rest durst no man join himself to them." Men were not eager in those days to "join the Church." The presence and power of God therein was so manifest that it was felt that a new life and a holy one was necessary for such a place. Days of powerlessness and unreality, when a profession of Christianity costs nothing, and may even yield earthly advantages, draw into the outward fellowship of the Church persons who know nothing of God and His saving grace. But the hindrance to real spiritual progress of such a dead weight of flesh is incalculable.

If men were filled with awe as they observed the power of the Holy Spirit thus operating within the Church, and so forbore to associate themselves therewith, the true work of God's sovereign grace proceeded apace. "Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5: 14). This is only the kind of "adding" that is worth anything.

A great following is easily procured, but if it is all hollowness and unreality, of what value is it? To be "added to the Lord" is to be brought into living touch with a Person. We thus come back to the question of all questions: "What think ye of Christ?"

Prison Again.

The power of the Spirit wrought both within and without the Church. Within, Ananias and Sapphira fell dead at Peter's feet; without, even the shadow of the apostle sufficed for the healing of the sick. The whole twelve were miraculously endowed; hence we read, "by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people" (Acts 5: 12-16). Miracles have an important place at the beginning of a new era. Many were wrought when the Son of God came to earth, and thus His glorious person was accredited (Acts 2: 22); more were granted during the period of the Acts when the Holy Spirit came down; and a new series will be witnessed when Christianity is done and the Antichrist shows himself (2 Thess. 2: 9-10). The Antichrist's miracles, it need hardly be said, will be wrought by the power of Satan.

The ecclesiastical authorities in Jerusalem were envious and angry at beholding such exhibitions of supernatural power in humble fishermen. Accordingly they laid violent hands upon them, and put the whole twelve in the common prison. But the angel of the Lord intervened at night (the first of many gracious interventions in the days of the apostles) and brought them out, with the charge: "Go, stand and speak to the people all the words of this life" (Acts 5: 17, etc.). At the earliest possible moment in the morning the apostles did as they were commanded. What a commission "all the words of this life!" A new life for man has been revealed in Jesus, and now, on the foundation of His death and resurrection, is being conferred upon all who believe in His name. "This life" eternal life carries with it a full discharge, the forgiveness of all trespasses (Col. 2: 13). "All the words of this life" were to be declared; nothing was to be withheld; the result being heaven begun below for those who welcomed to their hearts the gracious testimony. It is refreshing to consider the themes which engaged the preachers in the early days of Christianity. The great design with them was to bring men into spiritual touch with divine persons, the Father and the Son, that so their hearts might be clean delivered from the present evil world. Why are not such themes alone presented to men to-day? Who authorised the entire change in tone and character of ministry that is everywhere so observable now?

The whole Jewish Sanhedrim assembled together in the morning with all gravity to deal with their prisoners. Those who were sent to fetch them reported that the prison doors were found securely fastened, and the keepers were standing in their appointed stations, but the birds had flown. Presently one came and told them that the men were standing in the temple, preaching to the people, Officers were then sent to bring them, but no violence was attempted, for they feared the multitude. The High Priest challenged them thus: "Did we not straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." The last part of the charge was unreasonable enough when we remember their words to Pilate: "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matt. 27: 25). It is noticeable that the High Priest, in his address to the apostles, carefully avoided using the hated name of Jesus. "This name"; "your doctrine"; "this man's blood"; but not the name of Jesus. Yet to that name every knee must yet bow, and every

tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2: 9-11).

Peter and the other apostles boldly replied: "We ought to obey God rather than men." This was a distinct repudiation of the special place which the Jewish leaders had once held for God. It was gone, as the fruit of unbelief; they were now but "men," and that in open conflict with God. The apostles proceeded: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey Him." This language suggests that God had not yet given up His ancient people. "Our fathers" and "Israel" show this. The turning point was reached when Stephen's testimony was rejected, and himself murdered.

The Sanhedrim being disposed to slay their faithful reprovers, Gamaliel, one of their most respected members, commanded to put the apostles outside for a space while he reasoned with his companions. He reminded them of various impostors who had arisen, and who had perished miserably with all their followers. His suggestion, therefore, in regard to the twelve, was: "Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." This was sheer worldly wisdom, and wholly false in principle. Neither prosperity nor adversity in this world is proof whether a man or a cause be of God or not. The wicked often prosper. Job's friends erred in this most sadly. Habakkuk was sorely perplexed because of it; and Asaph, the writer of Ps. 73, had to follow the wicked in his thoughts beyond the grave in order to understand. But Gamaliel's advice served God's present purpose, and His servants were released, after a flogging, and a charge that they should not again speak in the name of Jesus, which charge they were no more disposed to heed now than when it was addressed to them some time previously. They departed "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for His name." Such men were neither fools nor fanatics; they knew a person — the glorious Son of the living God — and to be associated with Him, even in suffering and shame, was to them an unspeakable honour. They preached Jesus more vigorously than ever.

In Samaria.

Satan frequently outwits himself; and no wonder, for whatever his power, he is but a creature, and so is quite unable to see the end from the beginning. When he brought about the murder of Stephen, with a general persecution of Christians to follow, he doubtless imagined he had scored a great triumph. But an all-wise God ordered it otherwise. Among those who fled from Jerusalem at that crisis was Philip, one of the seven who had been set apart by the assembly to look after its poor. Going down to Samaria, he at once preached Christ to the people. The sovereignty of the Spirit of God is very marked here. The Church had deputed its money matters to Philip and his companions, and lo, Philip is found preaching! For spiritual work no human appointment is necessary; only superstition and ignorance of Scripture dare say otherwise.

A great work resulted in Samaria; (Acts 8: 1-13). This place, so long the religious rival of Jerusalem, was now subdued by the power of that grace which Jerusalem was driving away. "There was great joy in the city." Those who "believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, were baptised, both men and women." But at this point the gracious work of God paused for a while.

The good news ere long reached Jerusalem, where apparently the apostles were still able to maintain themselves spite of the opposition of the authorities. Whether they were right in continuing

there, seeing that the Lord had charged them to preach remission of sins in His name "among all nations" is a question (Luke 24: 47). But they rejoiced to hear of the grace of God in Samaria, and forthwith dispatched Peter and John to visit the place (Acts 8: 14-25). These found that the new converts had not yet received the crowning blessing of Christianity, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Accordingly they prayed for them, then laid their hands on them, and forthwith they received the Holy Spirit.

This simple action has been most grievously misunderstood and misrepresented in the interests of ecclesiastical officialism, and many souls have been injured thereby. The rite of Confirmation is indeed built upon it. But what is the significance of the laying on of hands? The general idea may be gathered from such a Scripture as Lev. 1: 4. It is expressive of identification.

He who laid hands on another declared thereby his oneness and sympathy with him. Hence the warning to Timothy: "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure" (1 Tim. 5: 22). The bearing of the action of Peter and John in Samaria was this: on behalf of the Christians in Jerusalem they expressed their oneness with the new group of believers which had sprung up in the city they had ever hated and despised. Instead of the Spirit falling immediately upon them, as upon the company in Caesarea in Acts 10: 44, the Samaritans were kept waiting for this blessing until Jerusalem expressed itself through the instrumentality of Peter and John. God thus openly signified that the Church, whether planted in this city or in that, is one. Had the Samaritans been treated precisely as the Jews on the day of Pentecost the old rivalry between the two religious centres, of which the woman spoke to the Saviour at the well in John 4: 20, might easily have been carried into Christianity. This was effectually prevented by the Samaritans being made to share the Jerusalem outpouring instead of receiving an independent outpouring of their own. The choice of instruments, too, was remarkable: Peter, the strictly conservative Jew, who had ever judged it an unlawful thing to come unto or keep company with a man of another nation (Acts 10: 28): and John, the son of thunder, who once asked his Lord if he should command fire to come down from heaven and consume the Samaritans as Elijah did (Luke 9: 51-56). But the most sectarian hearts are capable of learning lessons of grace in the school of God. So enlarged were the hearts of Peter and John by what they witnessed in Samaria, that on the homeward journey they evangelised many villages of the same once obnoxious people. They were beginning to understand that God is no respecter of persons.

Simon the Sorcerer

The visit of Peter and John to Samaria brought to light an appalling case of hypocrisy (Acts 8: 9-24). For a long time a sorcerer, Simon by name, had deceived the people by his Satanic wonders, Self-exaltation and personal gain were his objects, as with every other misleader ancient and modern. The people had come to call him "that power of God which is called Great" (R,V.). This man's spell was broken by the coming of Philip with the Gospel of Christ. There is indeed nothing else that can deliver men from the thralldom of Satan, whatever form that thralldom may take.

Remarkably, amongst those who came forward for baptism, professing faith in the Lord Jesus, was Simon himself. What was it that attracted such a character? "The miracles and signs which were done." He was astonished to find introduced into Samaria a power more marvellous than his own. There is no need to accuse him of making a profession of faith for the sake of gain; he was doubtless sincerely attracted by Philip's miracles, although his heart was never reached. Faith that is founded upon miracles is worthless, for it is of the essence of faith to believe in that which is unseen. In our Lord's time, many in Jerusalem believed in His name when they saw the miracles which He did, but to

such persons He did not trust Himself (John 2: 23-25). In the case of Nicodemus, conviction wrought by miracles happily led on to something better (John 3). In Acts 13: 6-12 we read of one who witnessed a miracle great indeed, but it was "the Word of God" he desired to hear, and in conclusion we are told that he "believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."

The coming of Peter and John was used by God to reveal Simon's true condition. Observing that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, all his natural love of self-importance and gain burst forth. Offering them money, he said: "Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit. Why should not the new religion be as profitable to him as the old? The unhappy man has provided us with a new word; but alas, how many of those who use the word "Simony" of others have been glaringly guilty of the same sin themselves!

Peter indignantly denounced the man: "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God." Money, like everything else connected with this world, is a perishable commodity; the man should also perish along with that which he loved so well. Even so, Peter invited him to repentance, for God desireth not the death of any sinner. "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." But no sign of repentance appeared; only fear of the consequences of his sin. "Pray ye to the Lord for me," said he to Peter, "that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me." He was in no humour to pray for himself, but he would be prayed for. Such a position is untenable for any man. Knowing nothing of the Lord for himself, Simon would hang upon Peter's intercession. But this could avail nothing for him, nor can it avail for us. Each soul must have to do with God for itself. The intervention of even an apostle is absolutely without value as a substitute for this.

Behold then Simon the sorcerer, duly baptised, but lost. Surely his story is recorded for the warning of many. If the apostle came amongst us to-day, would he not have to say to not a few Christian professors: "thy heart is not right in the sight of God!" The power of the Spirit in Peter detected unreality within the Church in Ananias and Sapphira, and outside it in Simon of Samaria. Thus was the infant Church mercifully preserved from persons whose kind has flooded it since to its sore damage and the Lord's dishonour.

Paul's Visit.

The next event of note in the history of the Church was the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. This remarkable man, distinguished amongst his fellows both for high morality and scrupulous religiousness, outdistanced everybody in hatred to the name of Jesus, and in contempt for His followers. Going beyond proper Jewish limits in his zeal against Christianity, he was stricken down outside the gates of Damascus by the light of the glory of Christ. In that moment of moments he learned that Jesus of Nazareth is Lord of all, and that His people, whom Saul was persecuting, were regarded by Him as part and parcel of Himself. "Why persecutest thou Me?" was the Lord's demand of His stricken foe. Blinded by the glory which thus shone round about him, Saul was led by the hand into the Syrian capital, and was three days sightless, and could neither eat nor drink. This painful season was brought to a close by the visit of Ananias, a certain disciple who dwelt in Damascus. He addressed him as "brother Saul" (a gracious recognition of the new relationship into which divine favour had brought him), and forthwith admitted him to the profession of Christianity by granting him baptism (Acts 9: 1-19). From that day Saul (who soon became known as Paul) threw overboard as worse than worthless all

his previous attainments in morality and religiousness, and henceforward made his boast in Christ alone. The blood of His cross was the basis of all his blessings, and the Saviour Himself was his joy and delight.

Some three years after his conversion he visited Jerusalem in order to make the acquaintance of Peter. He lodged with him fifteen days (Gal. 1: 18-19). The only other person of note that he met at that time was James, the Lord's brother. The assembly in Jerusalem was at first afraid of him, having only known Saul as a devourer of the flock of God. But Barnabas, described later as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith," introduced him to the apostles, telling them how the Lord had dealt with him, and "how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." The last remark is important as showing that this new witness did not go to Jerusalem to receive ordination at the hands of his predecessors in the apostolate. He had already done good work for Christ before he met Peter or any of his companions. In Gal. 1: 1 he calls himself "an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead." In the same chapter, in the course of a few autobiographical remarks, he says, "When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me by His grace to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me." It was a cardinal point with him who became pre-eminently the apostle of the Church that all ministry flows directly from the Head in heaven. The notion of human intervention in such a matter was exceedingly abhorrent to him.

But Paul desired to make the acquaintance of Peter; hence his fifteen days' visit to Jerusalem, as recorded in Gal. 1: 18-19. It would be interesting to know what these men of God discussed together at that time, but the Spirit of God has not been pleased to lift the veil. We may be assured that many of the precious details of our Lord's earthly pathway, of which Peter had been a personal witness, came into their everyday talk, and Saul would doubtless tell his new friend and brother something of what he had learned in the school of God both in Damascus and in Arabia. But Peter soon had to bid farewell to Saul. His bold preaching in Jerusalem so aroused some that plots were laid for his life. He was therefore got away to Caesarea by the brethren, and thence to Tarsus, the city of his birth (Acts 9: 28-30). What a world is this! It has murdered the Son of God, and has followed up with relentless hostility every true witness to his name, whether Saul, Peter, or any other.

Eneas and Tabitha.

Saul of Tarsus had now come upon the scene, and, as Paul the apostle, was about to be granted the unique place of honour in the Church, with which no other could possibly compare. But Peter was not therefore to be put aside, for the Spirit of God has room for every variety of worker. At a somewhat later date these servants of Christ made a bargain together, the one to labour amongst the Jews and the other to evangelise the Gentile world. Let it be carefully noted that it was Peter who agreed to restrict himself to service amongst the Jews. This understanding, with the names of the other contracting parties, is given in Gal. 2: 7-10. It is of interest because of the improper use that has been made of Peter's name amongst Gentile Christians for so long.

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus being recorded with its results, the Spirit once more brings Peter into the inspired narrative (Acts 9: 32-43). In the course of a preaching tour "he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda." In Acts 9 we have the title "saints" for the first time applied to believers of this dispensation. The Old Testament worthies are frequently so described in the earlier Scriptures, and the dead also in Matt. 27: 52. Now in Acts 9: 13, 41 we have the title given as a general

one to Christians In the epistles it is employed commonly. Superstition accords this title to a few special persons, as Matthew, Peter, etc., and then only after death; Scripture gives it here and now to every blood-washed believer in the Lord Jesus. Let this fact be carefully noted.

Our apostle found at Lydda a palsied man named Eneas, eight years bedridden. In response to Peter's word, "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole," he arose immediately. What a testimony to unbelieving Israel that God was prepared to honour to the uttermost the name of Him whom they had crucified! Whether Eneas was himself a believer is not recorded. It was more usual for such works of power to be wrought upon others, as an appeal to heart and conscience, not only in the beneficiary, but also in all observers. The result in this case was unique. "All that dwelt in Lydda and Saron (the plain of Sharon referred to in Cant. 2: 1) saw him, and turned to the Lord." This is the only instance in Scripture history of a whole population being simultaneously converted.

From Lydda Peter was summoned to the port of Joppa. An excellent Christian woman in the assembly there, by name in Hebrew Tabitha and in Greek Dorcas, famous for good works and alms-deeds, fell sick and died. Instead of burying her promptly, the disciples sent two of their number to Peter desiring him to come without delay, the body being meanwhile washed and laid in an upper room. Clearly they expected resurrection for her, and yet nothing of the kind had up to that moment been witnessed since the day of Pentecost. Many of God's poor saints, like Stephen, had been done to death, but in no single instance had any been raised again. But there is potency in the name of Jesus even in the presence of the last dread enemy, as Peter's visit to Joppa soon proved. The many widows whom Dorcas had befriended showed the apostle with weeping the coats and garments she had made for them. Hers was practical Christianity indeed, such as James 1: 27 inculcates for us all.

Peter, however, put all these aside and knelt down and prayed. He had no power of his own. Only his Master and Lord could speak of Himself as "the Resurrection and the Life." Rising from prayer, Peter said to the body, "Tabitha, arise." Her eyes opened, she sat up, took Peter's hand, and presently was shown to her rejoicing fellow saints, as alive again from the dead Some have found difficulty in the fact that the apostle did not on this occasion bring in the name of Lord Jesus, as in Acts 3: 6; Acts 9: 34, and some ancient manuscripts have positively intruded into them the words "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." But the difficulty is imaginary, not real. Peter's prayer is sufficient indication as to whom he depended upon for the performance of so mighty a deed. Remarkably, the spiritual results of this, Peter's greatest miracle, were not nearly so considerable as in the case of Eneas. Then "all" turned to the Lord; at Joppa "many" believed in the Lord! In this we see divine sovereignty "The wind bloweth where it listeth" (John 3: 8). We note the varied operations of the Spirit of God, but we are not always able to comprehend them. Peter "tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon, a tanner." How would such lodgings suit his professed successors?

In Cornelius' House.

The time had now come for the door of the Kingdom to be opened to the Gentiles, and Peter was the vessel honoured to this end, in accordance with the Lord's promise in Matt. 16: 19. It was a tremendous shock to Jewish conservatism to find Gentiles received and blessed on precisely the same terms as themselves. Even Peter himself had to be rebuked by the Lord in a vision ere he was willing to take his part in such service (Acts 10: 15, 28). Yet at Pentecost he said: "The promise is . . . all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2: 39).

The first Gentile to receive the call was Cornelius, an officer in the Roman garrison at Caesarea. He was in every way an attractive character. Godward, he was devout and a man of prayer; manward,

he was benevolent and gracious, and this to a conquered people. It marked divine consideration for Jewish feeling that such an one should be selected rather than a character like the Philippian jailer. Remarkably, Caesarea had already been visited by both Philip and Saul, yet neither appear to have preached the Gospel there (Acts 8: 40; Acts 9: 30).

In this we see the sovereignty of God. He has His own time and His own instruments for the execution of His work in every quarter.

Cornelius comes before us in Acts 10 as one altogether faithful to the light which God had given him. He was not yet a believer in Jesus, for the simple reason that although he was conversant with the facts of the Saviour's life and death, He had never been proclaimed to him as One in whom he, as a Gentile, might (and indeed must) claim a personal interest. One day, as he was in prayer at 3 p.m., an angel appeared to him, and bade him send to Joppa for a man called Simon Peter, who would tell him words whereby himself and his household should be saved (Acts 11: 14) Why this method? Why did not the angel tell him forthwith of the dead and risen Saviour? The answer is very simple. The privilege of preaching Christ belongs only to those who have themselves tasted redeeming grace. In like manner an angel directed Philip towards the eunuch in Acts 8: 26. Cornelius obeyed promptly, despatching three messengers to fetch up the man who had been named to him.

Meanwhile, the Lord wrought in Peter's heart also, thus preparing him for the new work that lay before him. On the day following the angel's visit to Cornelius, Peter went up to the housetop to pray about noon. A trance falling upon him, he saw what appeared to be a great sheet descending from heaven filled with all kinds of beasts, birds and creeping things. A Voice bade him arise, kill, and eat. He at once objected: "Not so, Lord: for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." The heavenly Voice spoke again: "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." The whole thing was thrice repeated, and then the vessel with its contents was received up into heaven. While the apostle was yet wondering in his mind what lesson the Lord had for him in this vision, it was reported to him that Cornelius' messengers were at the gate. He was now to preach Christ to Gentiles as freely as he had proclaimed Him to the Jews. Peter must learn that the cross had ended Israel's special dispensational privileges, all fleshly distinctions being annulled thereby; all men now stand upon one common level before God, and the Gospel message is addressed to "whosoever." A hard lesson indeed for one to learn whose nation had held a unique place in the divine plan for fifteen centuries.

Arrived at Caesarea, Peter refused the proffered homage of the centurion, and forthwith delivered his message. It was a remarkable meeting — a company of Roman patricians gathered together to hear a Galilean fisherman speak of a crucified Jew. Peter's address was brief, and its theme was Christ alone. Why should preachers ever discourse upon any other theme? The apostle spoke of the Saviour's wonderful pathway below, ever doing good, and despoiling the kingdom of Satan, "for God was with Him." But men slew Him, and hanged Him upon a tree. In opposition to men's hatred, God signified His good pleasure in Him by raising Him from the dead on the third day. In order that His people might have the fullest assurance that His resurrection was indeed a fact He showed Him openly to many, who even ate and drank with Him. Then Peter proclaimed Him as the divinely ordained Judge of quick and dead, adding, "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." Jesus is thus both Judge and Saviour; and every man must have to do with Him in one or other of these characters.

Whatever Peter intended to say more was never uttered for the Holy Spirit forthwith fell on all them which heard the word (Acts 10: 34-38). Blessed interruption! Would that we knew more of it in connection with our preaching to-day. The truth is, Peter's audience drank in his testimony word by

word as he rendered it, and so received divine forgiveness on the spot. Hence the gift of the Spirit, whom God bestows upon all forgiven ones, and upon them only. There was no laying on of hands here as in Samaria, for the reason that the special circumstances connected with Samaria had no place in Caesarea. Baptism followed forthwith, as a privilege granted in the name of the Lord. This is God's order for Christianity until the end; first, the forgiveness of sins; second, the gift of the Holy Ghost; and third, the rite of baptism.

Back in Jerusalem.

Men may call Peter "the prince of the apostles," and in the superstition of their minds put him upon a pedestal exceeding high; but he was clearly not so regarded in his own time. Accordingly, on his return to Jerusalem from Caesarea, he was called to account by his brethren for his conduct there. Peter did not question their right thus to challenge him. It never occurred to him that his words and deeds were above all criticism. At a somewhat later date he was constrained to accept a public rebuke from Paul for shifty behaviour at Antioch (Gal. 2: 11-16).

At his next appearance then in Jerusalem, his brethren of the circumcision contended with Peter, saying, "Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them" (Acts 11). The tidings of the "eating" apparently impressed them more than the tidings of the grace of God. What hearts are ours! The whole assembly in Jerusalem should have rejoiced that a large company of Gentiles had heard the word of the Gospel from the lips of Peter, and believed it to their eternal blessing. A praise meeting might well have been called in acknowledgment of God's wonderful grace to men so long regarded as outside of every good thing. But instead of this, the honoured instrument was called to account for his conduct in detail in "eating" with men of another nation.

Peter dealt frankly with his critics. Not a trace of irritation can be discovered in his defence. His heart was full of the wonderful grace of God to the Gentiles, and so he "rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them." He related his trance in the city of Joppa, and the vision of the great sheet, and what the Lord said to him concerning its contents. He told how at that juncture three men called at the house, summoning him to Caesarea to tell Cornelius and his friends words whereby they might be saved. The Spirit, moreover, bade him go with the men, nothing doubting. In order to guard against every possible misunderstanding, he took six brethren from Joppa with him, who were eyewitnesses of all that transpired in Caesarea, and who were with him now in Jerusalem prepared to add their corroborative testimony. Peter proceeded to tell his critics how, as he began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon his audience, as upon the Jewish believers at the beginning. God thus put no difference what ever between the Gentile and the Jew. In conclusion our apostle demanded: "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God?"

God be thanked for the answer. As the Jerusalem brethren listened to Peter's narrative, their objections were silenced, and they glorified God, saying, "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Would that every dispute amongst Christians could end so happily! Satan's attempt to bring in disunion amongst God's saints was thus foiled by the grace of God triumphing in all hearts. Yet much was involved for those who thus found fault with Peter. For them as Jews, it meant the complete renunciation of all the special privileges which their nation had enjoyed for fifteen hundred years. If God was indeed dealing with Gentiles on exactly the same terms as with Jews, then clearly Israel's unique place was gone. This was indeed true, the nation's rejection of the Lord Jesus having forfeited everything. Haughty chief priests and elders might refuse to acknowledge this, and so

contend earnestly against the new activity of the Spirit of God by means of the apostles; but those who challenged Peter in Acts 11 were men in whose hearts the grace of God wrought, accordingly at all cost to their national feelings and prejudices they acknowledged His grace to the "other sheep," who were not of their fold (John 10: 16).

Well may we bless God that He has "to the Gentiles also granted repentance unto life." "His blessed whosoever takes every lost one in." Gentile dwellers in Great Britain and elsewhere might well be filled with despair were it otherwise.

Herod's Persecution.

The saints in Jerusalem were not left long in peace. Herod — type of the wilful king of the last days (Dan. 11: 36) — "stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church" (Acts 12). His first victim was James, the brother of John. According to the Saviour's promise in Matt. 20: 23, he thus drank of His cup, and was baptised with His baptism. So ended in blood, so far as earth was concerned, a companionship of many years' standing. Prior to their first meeting with Jesus, the two brothers had wrought with Simon Peter as fishermen. Called by sovereign grace, they had been co-workers in testimony for their Lord. The work of James was now finished. Herod, perceiving that it pleased the Jews, next laid hands upon Peter, intending to sacrifice him when the Passover festival was over. The Holy Spirit significantly remarks — "then were the days of unleavened bread." Leaven is everywhere in Scripture the emblem of corruption. During their religious festivals the Jewish people were responsible to purge it out of their houses. Yet, at such a season, when they were more than usually zealous in the matter of externals, they could delight in blood! In like manner, our Lord's accusers were scrupulous about crossing a Gentile threshold at Passover time; while altogether without conscience about the murder of an innocent Man! (John 18: 28) Oh, religion, what bloody deeds and what consummate hypocrisy have been perpetrated in thy name!

On the previous occasion Peter was released from prison by angelic hands on the very night of his arrest (Acts 5: 19). This time the Lord suffered the enemy to detain him until a few hours before his intended execution. This was doubtless for the exercise of faith, both in the apostle himself and in his friends who prayed for him. For the assembly in Jerusalem made ceaseless supplication concerning the prisoner.

Peter was indeed to have the honour of a martyr's death — his Lord told him so in John 21: 18, but not yet. Our times are in His hand — what comfort! Confiding in the Lord, Peter was able to sleep peacefully in prison although bound to two soldiers with chains. Other soldiers were posted at the door of his cell, so determined was Herod not to lose his prey. But all men's precautions are useless when God asserts Himself. He who disposed of Pilate's stone and seal made short work of Herod's doors and guards. Accordingly on that memorable night, an angel awoke Peter, and bade him arise, gird himself, and follow him. The chains fell off, door after door opened before them, the soldiers sleeping on, and presently Peter found himself in the street, the angel then bidding him farewell. The apostle, only by this time fairly awake, then exclaimed: "Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectations of the people of the Jews."

He went to the house of the mother of John Mark, and there a stranger thing happened. Many Christians were at that moment gathered together for prayer concerning him. The maid who answered his knock, in her pleasure at hearing the well known voice, ran back into the meeting to report, leaving Peter still standing at the gate. A whole roomful of praying ones refused to believe her, and when the girl insisted that she had really heard Peter's voice they decided that it was an apparition! How

unbelieving are the hearts of even true believers in the Lord Jesus! In this case the Lord was good beyond all the expectations of His people. When the apostle at last gained admittance, he related how the Lord had delivered him, and then went his way, bidding them tell James (the Lord's brother), and the rest of the brethren.

After his release in Acts 5: 19 he was instructed to go into the temple, and there preach the words of eternal life. But he had no such commission now; Jerusalem's day was done. Nothing remained to the rejected witness but to act upon the word in Matt. 10: 23, and flee to another place.

Herod's end is recorded in Acts 12 as a kind of appendix. There came a day when he accepted divine honour from the people, and was forthwith smitten by the angel of the Lord. His body was eaten of worms, and his spirit went to torment. Expressive but awful type of Israel's last king, the Antichrist. Claiming and receiving that homage which is due to God alone, he will be promptly dispatched to the lake of fire at the Lord's appearing (Rev. 19: 20).

It is pointedly added in Acts 12: 24: "But the word of God grew and multiplied." So it must be ever, for God can never accept defeat at the hands of His creatures. All who seek to frustrate His purposes of grace but dash themselves to pieces in the vain attempt.

The Jerusalem Council

It was in no sense "a general council" (as men speak), but it was a very important gathering nevertheless, and its decisions are authoritative to this hour. It was a gathering of the apostles and elders, with the assembly in Jerusalem, to discuss the question whether or not Gentiles should be subjected to the law of Moses (Acts 15).

It happened on this wise. After the return of Paul and Barnabas from their first missionary tour, they spent a considerable time amongst the brethren in Antioch, by whom they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled. At that juncture certain Jewish brethren came along, who taught the Antioch Christians that unless they were circumcised and kept the law of Moses they could not be saved. It will be observed that in the early Church there was liberty for any to minister who felt themselves able to do so, the hearers being responsible to judge their utterances as to whether they were of God or not (1 Thess. 5: 21). The notion of a "clergyman" had not yet occurred to the minds of any.

Paul and Barnabas resisted these law teachers earnestly, perceiving the deep dishonour of putting human works alongside the perfect work of the Lord Jesus. His Calvary sacrifice is of such infinite value that nothing more can ever be required as a ground of standing before God. But God, in His perfect wisdom, did not permit the law dispute to be settled at Antioch. It suited His ways better that Jerusalem — the centre and hotbed of legalism — should pronounce upon it. Accordingly the brethren at Antioch desired Paul and Barnabas, with certain others, to go "up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question." Another view of this journey is presented to us in Gal. 2. "I went up by revelation," says Paul. We have thus the outward circumstances in Acts 15, and the inward guide of his steps in Gal. 2.

It was a sort of triumphal progress. On their way down from the North, as they passed through Phenice and Samaria, Paul and Barnabas related the wonderful work of God's grace amongst the Gentiles, occasioning thus great joy to all the brethren they met. Titus, a young Greek convert, accompanied them, whom some desired to circumcise; but this Paul resisted to the uttermost, the principle involved being of the deepest importance. They appear to have had a private interview with

the apostles before any public meetings were held. Paul laid before them the Gospel he was everywhere proclaiming forgiveness of sins and justification from all things through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Not only were they unable to find fault with such a testimony, but they saw nothing that should be added thereto. James, Peter and John, recognising that Paul and Barnabas had received a special commission from God, gave them the right hand of fellowship, and agreed that the whole Gentile field should be left to them, whilst they would confine themselves to the Jewish people (Gal. 2: 1-10). Let those who imagine that Peter ever laboured in Rome note this fact carefully.

In the public council there was much disputing. Even true believers, who had been brought up as Pharisees, insisted that faith in Christ was not of itself sufficient for salvation; the law of Moses must be adopted also. Then Peter arose. He reminded the company of the divine action at Caesarea, where a number of Gentiles heard the word of the Gospel from his lips and believed, and were forthwith granted the gift of the Holy Spirit, even as the Jewish believers had been favoured at the beginning. God had thus signified that He put no difference between the Gentile and the Jew. Why then should they seek to Judaize the Christians at Antioch and elsewhere? Our apostle concluded his brief speech with the striking passage — "We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus we shall be saved, even as they." Not "they even as we," but "we even as they." Peter thus formally abandoned all special pretensions for himself and others of his nation. He was henceforth content to be numbered with others of alien race as together sinners saved by grace. Barnabas and Paul followed with some account of the work of God amongst the Gentiles by their means. James then summed up. Peter was evidently not regarded as president of the gathering. Nor did James thus pronounce sentence because he was "the first bishop of Jerusalem," as some affirm. A single bishop in a city was a person unknown in those days. Where bishops existed at all there was a plurality in every place (Phil. 1: 1; Titus 1: 5). In the presence of all the apostles surely no mere bishop would claim pre-eminence. The truth is, God the Holy Spirit was present in that gathering, and He saw divine suitability in using James, the most intensely Jewish person in the company, to give utterance to the emancipating decree. James' sentence was that since Moses' law was everywhere preached in the Jewish synagogues, the law had better remain there, and not be imported into the Christian assembly. He proposed that letters should be sent to the Gentile brethren enjoining three things only — avoidance of pollutions of idols, fornication, things strangled, and blood. These were ancient requirements of the Creator before Moses' voice was heard.

Two brethren from Jerusalem, Judas and Silas, were sent to Antioch with Barnabas and Paul, as bearers of the apostles' letter and as witnesses who could confirm everything by word of mouth. The council of Jerusalem might as well never have been held, for all the notice that is taken of its decrees today. For it is undeniable that throughout Gentile Christendom Moses' law is sounded forth in men's ears to this hour, with all its attendant curses, to the obscuring of the infinite grace of God revealed in the Gospel. Thus are believers deprived of the light and liberty which Christ died to procure for them, and darkness and bondage possess their souls instead. To put Gentile Christians under law in any shape or form is to "trouble" them, and "pervert the Gospel of Christ" (Gal 1: 7).

Rebuked at Antioch.

What interval of time elapsed between the Jerusalem conference and Peter's visit to Antioch is not recorded, but it is probable his visit followed the conference very soon. When Peter saw the wonderful work of God's grace in this Syrian city — a multitude of Gentiles saved and brought into the assembly of God, his heart rejoiced, and he made himself perfectly free amongst them (Gal. 2: 11-16). He remembered the Lord's words at Joppa — "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" —

and he thankfully recognized these uncircumcised ones as brethren in Christ. He not only had open communion with them in the assembly, but socially also "he did eat with the Gentiles."

But presently certain of James's friends from Jerusalem came down, and at once Peter's conduct changed. "When they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision." Spite of the recent conference, the Jerusalem Christians were still honeycombed with Judaism, and evidently Peter feared loss of prestige on his return if he was seen making himself free with Gentiles abroad.

Alas, the evil spread. "The other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation."

The matter thus became very serious. The whole truth of Christianity was at stake, whether Peter, Barnabas, and the rest perceived it or not. All mere fleshly distinctions have been ended in the death of Christ; salvation is of grace and free to all alike; and of all saved ones a new thing has been formed in the earth — the body of Christ. All this was challenged by Peter's conduct at Antioch. What is man — even at his best! Peter, the man who opened the door of faith to the Gentiles in Acts 10, would now thrust them from him as unworthy of his association! Barnabas, the man who, in conjunction with Paul, had led many of these Gentiles to Christ, and who had united with Paul in his contention with Judaizing teachers, now joins with Peter in his avoidance of his uncircumcised brethren! "Dissimulation," i.e., hypocrisy, Paul calls it, because they were acting in the teeth of their own conscientious convictions. Truly, "the fear of man bringeth a snare," even upon apostles of Christ!

The man for the emergency was Paul. He rebuked Peter to his face before the whole assembly. Did this begin a life-long enmity? Far from it. At a later date. Peter called his reprover "our beloved brother Paul" (2 Peter 3: 15). He recognized the justness of the rebuke that was administered to him, and profited by it. This is what Paul said: "If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews (and Peter had certainly been doing this before James's friends came upon the scene), why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." This means that though Peter and Paul had both been brought up under the law of Moses they had learned the futility of attempting to be justified thereby. Accordingly they were both believers in Jesus Christ, in order that they might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law. How then could Peter consistently impose the law-system upon Gentile Christians at Antioch?

The fallen apostle may possibly have feebly objected that he intended nothing so serious. But Paul did not understand how a man could conform to law requirements at all, even in so simple a matter as not eating with Gentiles, without thereby involving himself in the whole system. This is the point of his protest on that occasion. Would that men in Christendom understood it to-day! For it is undeniable that masses of professing Christians boast of their acceptance of the law, and consent to have its enactments read out in their hearing in their public services, and yet never dream of carrying out its demands. For example, when was it last gravely suggested to put any man to death for breaking the Sabbath? Who really accepts the place of the "cursed" one, and yet Scripture says: "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them?" (Gal. 3: 10). And again: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2: 10).

The ground of the law is hopeless for man, so deep is his guilt and ruin. But the Gospel proclaims

that God has found a way whereby He can justify even sinful men apart from law at all. That way is the blood of Christ (Rom. 3: 21-31). Happy is the man who abandons all pretension before God, and accepts His sovereign grace.

Later Years.

So far as Scripture history is concerned, we hear no more of Peter after the regrettable incident at Antioch. His epistles, written some years after, suggest a widespread ministry amongst Jews "scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1: 1), and they contain also anticipations of a violent death for Christ's sake (2 Peter 1: 12-15; John 21: 18-19). But no details of our apostle's later activities has been preserved for us by the Spirit of God. The fiction of a long residence in Rome is amply disproved by such passages as Gal. 2: 9; 1 Peter 1: 1. Nor does 1 Peter 5: 13 help this extraordinary notion, as some mistakenly imagine. The italicised words "the Church" in the Authorised Version have no authority whatever. The Revised Version is unquestionably right in its rendering, "She that is in Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you." The apostle is simply sending a Christian greeting from his wife, who was with him at the moment of writing in the erstwhile capital of Nebuchadnezzar (1 Cor. 9: 5). "Elect," is never connected in Scripture with the Church as such, but with the saints viewed individually (2 Peter 1: 10; 1 Peter 1: 2).

That Babylon in Peter's first epistle does not mean Rome is sufficiently proved by the fact that the symbolical name was not given until the Apocalypse was written at a much later period; and even if Peter had known it beforehand, it is unlikely that he would have used it in an ordinary epistle and in connection with common-place salutations. Let those who insist that Babylon means Rome consider that by so doing they accept for the system they love the responsibility for all the enormities attributed to the scarlet-clothed woman whom John saw, and also the awful doom so graphically described in Rev. 17: 18! Surely it is not without significance that the last notice of the mother of our Lord in Holy Scripture is as praying amongst other praying ones, not as being prayed to: and the last notice of Peter is, not as the presiding head of the Church on earth, but as being publicly rebuked for the gravest inconsistency by the apostle Paul (Acts 1: 9; Gal. 2: 2). The all wise Spirit of God foresaw how superstitious minds, deceived by Satan, would some day regard these honoured saints. and so furnished guards and warnings accordingly. Our only true confidence and hope is in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

"Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power, before all time, and now, and for evermore. Amen." (Jude 24: 25).