

Acts 8 - 14

W. Kelly.

Part 2 of An Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles newly translated from an amended text.

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Acts 8

Outwardly also the death of Stephen was the epoch when the murderous spirit, provoked by his solemn and fearless testimony, burst out against all who bore the name of the Lord.

'And there arose on that day a great persecution against the assembly that was in Jerusalem, and¹ they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles. And devout men buried Stephen and made great wailing over him. But Saul was ravaging² the assembly, entering throughout the houses, and dragging men and women was delivering [them] to prison. They therefore that were scattered abroad went about evangelizing the word'² (vers. 1-4).

1 The first hand of the Sinaitic leaves out the copula, with two cursives, which Tischendorf singularly adopts. It is just as necessary as in ver. 2.

2 Laud's MS., E, gives the aorist here, and adds 'of God' at the end of ver. 4, in both faultily, in the latter with several Versions.

Blinded by religious pride and jealousy the Jews were but sealing their guilt irrecoverably. Those who despised the Messiah in humiliation on earth were now rebelling against Him glorified in heaven, rejecting withal the Holy Spirit Whom He had sent down to render a divine testimony to His glory. Man in his best estate is not only vanity but enmity against the God of love. The spirit of the departed martyr they had sent, as one said, to Jesus on high with the message, We will not have this Man to reign over us. So had the Lord once figured the hatred of 'the citizens' in the parable of the pounds (or, minas) (Luke 19: 11-27); and thus were His words punctually verified. That generation has not passed away; nor will it, as He has apprised us, till all things He predicted shall have taken place, and the most tremendous of these woes await the end of the age which He terminates by His appearing in glory.

But the rage then in Jerusalem was so intense and widespread against the assembly there that they were all scattered abroad except the apostles. It was in accordance with the word of the Lord that the testimony of the gospel of grace should begin 'at Jerusalem', and so it did. It was necessary that the

word of God should first be spoken to the Jews, and so it was. 'This salvation of God' must be sent unto the Gentiles, and they will also hear: but it must go fully to the Jews first, and this was now being done; and the Jews rejected it with a persecuting obstinacy as yet beyond all example on earth. It was reserved for Popery to outdo that day in unrelenting opposition to the word of God and in sanguinary hatred of His saints. 'They were all scattered abroad' throughout the neighbouring regions 'except the apostles': a persecution as remarkable for its success in dispersing the objects of its fury, as for the exception specified; for those who stayed would naturally be the most obnoxious of all.

This is the more striking because the charge in Matt. 10: 23 ('when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next') was primarily to the twelve so strange it seems that Canon Humphry should take our chapter as a fulfilment of the command of our Lord, though the closing words point rather to a future testimony in the land before the end of the age. Nor is Calvin more happy who will have it that the apostles remained behind as good pastors for the safety of the flock; for it is evident that the sheep were all gone. Still less tolerable is Bp. Pearson's idea (*Lect. in Acta App. iv. x. p. 62, Opera Posth.* 4to. Lond. 1698) that the tradition of the second century, mentioned by Clemens Alex. and Eusebius (*H.E.*), accounts for it; namely, that our Lord forbade the apostles leaving Jerusalem for twelve years! This very chapter later on disproves it. *He* bade them go and disciple all the nations, yea, go into the world and preach the gospel to all the creation. Remission of sins was to be preached in His name to all the nations, beginning with Jerusalem. They were to tarry in the city but it was expressly till they were clothed with power from on high, without a thought of twelve years.

But for the present, in the face of that great persecution, the apostles abide. Divine wisdom ordered all aright. They remain there together unmoved by the storm which dispersed all others, for important purposes which afterwards appear; and the spread of the glad tidings falls under the good hand of the Lord to His scattered saints. No man beforehand could have foreseen such a result of such an ebullition. God was rejected not alone in His unity as of old, but also in His Son, and now in His Spirit. His truth was counted a lie, His saints as sheep for the slaughter. But if the apostles abode, the dispersed brethren went in all directions announcing the glad tidings of the word. It is just the action of the Holy Spirit in the gospel which we see as God's answer to the people's full and final rejection of His grace; and this was secured in the best and most unmistakable way by the apostles remaining, while all the rest were scattered, with no other external impulse than the last degree of human hatred from rebellious Israel in the city of solemnities itself. The love of Christ constrained: they believed and therefore spoke.

Meanwhile 'pious men buried Stephen, and made great wailing over him' (ver. 2). There is nothing in the epithet to necessitate our regarding these as disciples. They were rather God-fearing Jews whose conscience revolted against the lawless end of a trial that began with the form of Jewish law and was carried on with the corruption of suborned testimony which then characterized the chosen nation. Calvin has missed the point of the account by the assumption that it is for us a lesson of the faithful even in the heat of persecution, not discouraged but zealous in the discharge of those duties which pertain to godliness. Still further did he err in making Luke also commend their profession of godliness and faith in their lamentation, as if they identified themselves with Stephen's life and death, and testified withal what great loss the church of God had suffered by his decease. The force of this history lies in the raising up decent burial and exceeding lamentation on the part of Jews who were not of the assembly, when those on whom it would have devolved were not there to pay the last offices of love. There is no need with Meyer to render the particle which introduces the account as an adversative. The writer was inspired to give it as an additional feature of the scene, not without interest and profit to the believer who sees and values the gracious care of God even in such

circumstances. A Gamaliel stands up for righteous wisdom at the right moment, and pious men bury the martyr with great wailing where it could be least expected.

The true opposition is in what is next told us of his fanatical and bitter zeal who was afterwards to be the most devoted servant of the Lord, who had also to experience what it is in the church to be less loved the more abundantly he loved, spending and spent out most gladly for the souls of men. 'But Saul was ravaging the assembly, entering the houses throughout, and dragging both men and women delivered [them] to prison' (ver. 3). Religious rage is of all the most unrelenting; and fresh victims do not satiate but whet its cruel appetite, sex and age being alike disregarded.

It may be well here to remark that εὐαγγελίζεσθαι 'to announce the glad tidings' is ministry of the gospel no less than κηρύσσειν to 'proclaim, or preach', in ver. 5. After Dr. Hammond, Mr. Brewster in his *Lectures* on this book gives no valid reason for laying stress on the difference, in order to support what he calls 'regular commission'. First, the former word (εὐαγγελίζεσθαι) is used of our Lord Himself (Matt. 11: 5; Luke 4: 18, 43; Luke 7: 22; Luke 8: 1; Luke 20: 1), so it is of the apostles (Luke 9: 6, Acts 5: 42; Acts 13: 32, Acts 14: 7 15, 21; Acts 15: 35; Acts 16: 10; Acts 17: 18; Rom. 1: 15; Rom. 10: 15; 1 Cor. 1: 17, 1 Cor. 9: 16, 18, 1 Cor. 15: 1, 2; 2 Cor. 10: 16; 2 Cor. 11: 7; Gal. 1: 8, 11, 16, 23; Gal. 4: 13; Eph. 3: 8); surely far more than enough to refute the mean or vague use to which he would confine it. Secondly, the latter word (κηρύσσειν) is so little restricted to an official class, that it is applied to the healed leper and demoniac in their proclaiming what the Lord had done for each of them (Mark 1: 45, Mark 5: 20), and so to those who published the cure of the deaf and dumb (Mark 7: 36). Again, it (κηρύσσειν) stands side by side with the former word in Luke 4: 18, 19, 44; Luke 8: 1; Luke 9: 2; Rom. 10: 15; 1 Cor. 1: 23; 1 Cor. 9: 27; 1 Cor. 15: 11, 12; 2 Cor. 11: 4. Further, the latter word (κηρύσσειν), not the former, is used of those at Rome, who during the apostle's imprisonment preached Christ, some even of envy and strife, thinking to raise up affliction for him in his bonds (Phil. 1: 15, 16). Were there an atom of truth in the alleged distinction, there would be just the occasion to employ this supposed expression for mere speaking or irregular work. But it is not so; the apostle describes the preaching of the heartless as well as the true workmen by the term (κηρύσσω) which Mr. B. will have to be distinctive of the duly commissioned official.

The notion is therefore wholly unscriptural. Difference of course no one denies, for the one means to announce glad tidings, the other to proclaim or publish, but this is wholly independent of the desired confinement of preaching to those ordained for the purpose, an idea purely imaginary and opposed to all the evidence of scripture. Those who had the gift were not free but bound to exercise it in responsibility to Christ the Lord. Elders were chosen by apostles or apostolic envoys, and deacons by the multitude but for other objects, nor did they ever preach in virtue of their proper office. They might be evangelists like Philip. Otherwise they were no more authorized than the rest of the saints, like the dispersed before us. Rules and order even in earthly things are of moment, but quite distinct from preaching or teaching for which ordination is unknown to God's word.

But Dr. Guyse represents another class which limits 'all' scattered abroad to 'preachers'! This he does by misinterpreting verse 2 of 'Stephen's religious friends', and those ravaged by Saul in verse 3, so as to deny the general preaching by the turning it into the 'remainder of the 120 that was called the apostles' own company' (Acts 4: 23), and perhaps including several other later converts that had received the gift of the Holy Ghost and went about as evangelists to preach the gospel! How sad these evasions of the truth on the part of godly men! Power makes itself felt; and gifted men should be the last to silence any Christian who can evangelize. For it is a question of divine qualification, not of human sanction, which last is really a restraint on the Holy Spirit, a slight of Christ's grace, and a hindrance, so far as man can be a hindrance, to sinners' salvation. How blessed the grace of God, Who,

without design on the apostles' part or even a hint from any, turned the world's dispersion of the assembly into scattering far and wide the seeds of gospel truth!

1 Much truer to the word is Doddridge's note — 'There is no room to inquire where these poor refugees had their orders. They were endowed with miraculous gift; if they had not been so, the extraordinary call they had to spread the knowledge of Christ wherever they came, among those who were ignorant of Him would abundantly justify them in what they did,' (*Fam. Expos.* iii. 105, 106 Tenth Ed.)

Among the great host of those that were scattered publishing the word of the Lord one is singled out by the Spirit of God, who achieved a signal victory for grace where law had utterly failed as always. Samaria was won by the gospel to the name of Jesus; and the good soldier who fought was Philip. He was one of the seven chosen by the saints and appointed by the apostles to do diaconal work in Jerusalem. But the ascended Lord had given him as an evangelist, as we may learn expressly from Acts 21: 8; and here we find him in Samaria engaged in this work for which he had the gift, not in that office to which he had been ordained now that the dispersion of the saints from Jerusalem no longer admitted of its functions. But as gift is in the unity of Christ's body (Eph. 4: 11-13), so its exercise is above passing circumstances and has ample scope, where a local charge were out of place, as our chapter abundantly testifies. It is the free action of the Holy Spirit exemplified in the details of an individual, as we have already seen it generally in the dispersed.

'And Philip went down to a city of Samaria and preached to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord gave heed to the things spoken by Philip, when they heard, and saw the signs which he did. For [as to] many¹ that had unclean spirits, they went out crying with a loud voice and many palsied and lame were healed. And there was great² joy in that city' (vers. 5-8)

1 The true text here is a good instance of the tendency in later copyists to soften down a rugged or peculiar construction and so get rid of the difficulty. The older MSS., ABCE, some cursives, and among the ancient versions the Vulg., Sah., Syrr., *et al.*, support πολλοὶ, which gives grammatically an anacoluthon or irregularity of construction by no means uncommon: so 7: 40. We can easily understand the change to πολλῶν in order to make all smooth, supported by but two later uncials (HP) with the mass of cursives *et al.*

2 The critical reading πολλῆ χαρᾶ (not μεγάλης) seems to refer to the extent rather than the quality of the joy.

The worthlessness of tradition is made manifest, though unintentionally, by Eusebius (*H.E.* iii. 31; ed. Heinichen, i. 261-263), who cites a letter of Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus, to Victor, bishop of Rome, before the end of the second century, speaking of Philip as 'one of the twelve apostles', 'and his daughters'. But what could be expected of a man who could in the same letter interlard the scriptural description of John with 'who became priest bearing as he did the mitre' or high-priest's plate? See also Eusebius *H.E.* v. 24. So rapid was the loss of Christ's truth, so inexcusable in presence of plain scriptural facts before all readers. They may ridicule Papias; but what of one bishop who reports the fable, and of another (among the most learned in his day) who uses it more than once in his History of the Church? Such are very early Christian fathers, ignorant of scripture to the last degree, yet idolized by superstitious men who profess to receive the Scriptures as inspired of God.

It is interesting to note that the city in question was the same where the Son of God had made Himself known to not a few Samaritans who confessed Him to be the Saviour of the world (John 4: 39-42).

Now the Christ is preached there by one of whom it could be said in all truth — that after serving well as a deacon, he was gaining to himself a good standing, or step in advance, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 3: 13). It was meet that both should be rather in Sychar (afterwards Neapolis and Nablous), ancient Shechem and Sichem at the foot of Gerizim, the mountain that vainly sought to rival Jerusalem, rather than in the city of Samaria, lately rebuilt or enlarged by Herod the Great, and named Sebaste in honour of Augustus.³ There the Lord deigned to abide two days, deepening the impression produced by the sinful woman saved from death, and giving them to hear Him themselves and to know the truth in Himself.

³ In no part of this chapter or of the New Testament is the city meant, but the country, containing cities and many villages. Sychar was the religious centre ebase the capital politically.

The enemy seemed now in possession like a flood; but the Spirit of the Lord lifts up a standard against him in the preaching of Philip, confirmed by the signs which he wrought before their eyes. No miracle was needed there when the Lord visited the place and wrought as the great and acknowledged Prophet, though in truth the central object and glorious sum of all prophecy. It was the Father seeking true worshippers through the Son, Who declared Him in a fullness of grace and truth which surmounted the trammels of Judaism; and the word went home in power though not without the Holy Ghost which the Son gives as a divine spring of unending enjoyment. But now Satan had sought to efface the truth and set up a rival in sorcery, ever apt to seduce, interest, and alarm those who know not the true God. And the time was also come for God to bear witness in men, the servants of Christ on earth, to His victory over Satan and His glorification on high, as we have seen in previous chapters of this Book. Hence the energy of the Spirit was at work in Samaria in a free herald of the gospel, after the testimony had been refused with an enmity up to death in Jerusalem. On the one hand, the crowds gave heed with one accord to the things spoken by Philip; on the other, from many that were possessed unclean spirits came out with loud outcries, and many palsied and lame were healed. Can we wonder that 'there was much joy in the city'? But with Luke 8: 13 before me I could not affirm so absolutely as J. Calvin (*Opera* vi. 71) that the joy must be the fruit of faith. At least the 'faith' may not be of God, as we see in the flagrant case which the Holy Spirit brings here before us. Indeed not a few remarks in Calvin's Commentary seem rash.

Yea, such was the power at work that even the main instrument of Satan fell under the general influence of the multitudes he had so long seduced to his lies. 'But a certain man, Simon by name, was before in the city practising magic and amazing the nation of Samaria, saying that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed from small to great, saying, He is the power of God that is called¹ Great. And they gave heed to him, because a long time he had amazed them with his magic arts. But when they believed Philip evangelizing² about the kingdom of God and the name of ³ Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women. And Simon also himself believed; and being baptized he continued with Philip and, beholding signs⁴ and great works of power as they were done, was amazed' (vers. 9-13).

¹ ABCDE, many cursives, and ancient Vv., etc. supply καλουμένη 'called', omitted in the Received Text on inferior authority, and probably because the copyists, not perceiving its importance, imagined it was a mere gloss. It is expressive of the egregious assumption of the impostor.

² On the other hand τὰ 'the things' is an insertion contrary to the oldest witnesses, which enfeebles the sense here, and in Acts 28: 23, though in general a favourite expression of Luke if not peculiarly his.

³ The article, read by a few cursives but adopted in the Text. Rec., has no place here in the best

authorities.

4 The best copies and Versions have the order of words here followed as in the margin of the Authorized Version. R. Stephens, Elz., Beza even from his first edition (Tiguri, 1559) are right; not so Erasmus and Colinaeus who read *δυνάμεις καὶ σημεῖα*, nor the Complut. Edd. who have *δ. κ. σ. μεγάλα*. It may be added that the MSS. CD from the primary hand join at the end of the verse in the great blunder of 'they were' amazed.

This is the only reliable account of one who prominently figures in the early ecclesiastical writers as a heresiarch most hostile to the truth, but with so much fable surrounding him as to prove how little we can trust their statements. Some object to his being classed with the leaders of heresy, on the ground that he was not a Christian. He certainly was 'baptized', as he is said to have 'believed', and thus had a better title (as far as profession goes) than his Samaritan master Dositheus, who is said to have been a disciple of John the Baptist, but eclipsed in his leadership subsequently by Simon. Even Justin Martyr who had the double advantage of being a native of Flavia Neapolis which arose out of the ruins of Sychar, and of being born not a century after, seems to have fallen into the blunder of confounding the Sabine deity, Semo Sancus (who had a statue erected to his honour), with Simon Magus. Dr. E. Burton in a note to his *Bampton Lectures* (Oxford, 1829) endeavours to show the impossibility of such a mistake on the part of Justin, and has put together from various learned men what can be said in favour of Simon's deification at Rome. If it were so, it is of small consequence. The alleged contests between him and the apostle Peter whether at Caesarea or at Rome, are too absurd to notice, being evidently legends grafted on the inspired history by the unhallowed hands of men whose mind and conscience were alike defiled. Destitute of the truth they betook themselves to marvels of the imagination, which after all rather detract from the solemn effect of sacred history, and add nothing to the dignity of the apostle's exposure, or to the blind self-condemnatory turpitude of the unhappy man himself.

Whatever the mischievous result of Simon's sorcery and falsehoods leading to his own blasphemous pretensions — and we are here told of his misleading all around small and great (for what avail rank or education to guard from error?) — all vanished like smoke before the light of the gospel. 'The kingdom of God' and 'the name of Jesus' annihilated the vain jugglery and impious frauds of the Samaritan.

But it is instructive to notice that there is a difference in the language of verse 12 as compared with 13, and a difference in favour of the men and women in the former as against the latter. They are said simply to have believed the testimony and to have been baptized; the same is said of Simon with the important addition that he attended closely to Philip, and while beholding the signs and great works of power as they were done, was amazed. This was what transported him, not the love of God, not the truth of Christ, nor the grace of the gospel even to such a guilty deceitful wretch as himself, but the wondrous power which wrought before his eyes. Its overwhelming reality struck none so deeply as Simon. Others had their eyes drawn to the kingdom and its holy glories; others in spirit fell down and clasped the feet of their unseen Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ, lost in wonder, love, and praise. Simon was in ecstasies, beholding the signs and great deeds of power, the character of which was discerned by none more clearly than himself. *He* yielded to evidence and believed what approved itself to his mind irrefragably. Not a word implies self-judgment before God, not a word of any gracious action on his heart. Conscience was not ploughed up; nor did the affections flow under the sense of God's immeasurable grace in Christ to save trim from his sins. On the other hand, it is not said of the men and women in the verses before that they were 'amazed', as Simon was in his close attendance on Philip, not to hear the truth more fully and grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord

Jesus, but 'beholding the signs and great deeds of power as they came to pass.'

The Spirit of God thus lays bare to us in this description, it seems to me, the merely natural source of Simon's faith as distinguished from others. And such is all faith that is founded on 'evidences', which the mind judges and accepts accordingly. It may not be in the least insincere, and those who so believe may be the readiest to do battle, if it seem necessary, for their creed. But there is no life, as there is no repentance, no link with Christ formed by the Holy Spirit through the reception of the word, because it is God's word, discovering God to the guilty conscience and delivering withal through Christ dead and risen.

Still Simon may have fully credited himself with honest conviction of the truth; and, in the warmth and haste of so mighty a work in so short a time, not even Philip saw reason to question his confession. In fact, where it is the mind without conscience, progress is much more rapid, and all outwardly looks promising for a little where a soul thus easily passes into the ranks of Christ. We have not long to wait for the circumstances which betrayed unmistakably the unrenewed condition of Simon's soul, delivered the saints from what had else been a constant incubus, and gave himself the most solemn warning that his heart was not right with God.

The tidings of God's gracious work in Samaria could not but make a powerful impression on all saints; and of these none would estimate its importance so deeply as the personal companions and most honoured servants of the Lord in Jerusalem. His will and glory, as well as love to the objects of His grace that they might be blessed more abundantly, drew their hearts to the spot where God had wrought so manifestly. Indeed the Lord risen (Acts 1: 8) had specially named Samaria as a scene of future testimony for the disciples. What a contrast with Jews having no intercourse with Samaritans!

'Now when the apostles that were in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, the which on coming down, prayed for them that they might receive [the] Holy Spirit; for as yet He had fallen upon none of them: only they had got baptized unto the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Spirit' (vers. 14-17).

Some important principles of truth, too often overlooked, are illustrated here.

The independency of congregationalism is shown to be as far as possible from the will of God. There was no holding aloof on the part of the chiefs in Jerusalem, though we hear of no request for their intervention on the part of the Samaritans. The apostles felt as members of the one body of Christ for the fresh objects of divine grace; and yet the chosen future exponent of that great mystery was still in his sins and unbelief.

Nor was there the smallest jealousy in Philip, because other servants of Christ came whose place in the assembly was so much higher than his own. Love, the 'way of surpassing excellence', as yet prevailed; and as the members generally had the same care one for another, in none did this appear so conspicuously as in those whom God set in the church first: for Christ's sake and according to His word they were in the midst of them serving as bondmen. Nothing was farther from the heart of the chiefs who ruled, than on the one hand to be called Rabbi, Father, and Master, or on the other to affect the lordly style of either patronizing or despising the Gentiles. It was on all sides the power of the life of Christ.

Again, it will be noticed that the apostles sent two of their number, not James (son of Alphaeus) and Thaddaeus, nor Simon Zelotes and Matthias but their unquestionably choicest pair, Peter and John. Can any believer be so dull as to conceive that this had no far-reaching purpose in the mind of

Him Who dwells in the assembly and knows the end from the beginning and would give the sure light of His word to such as look to Him for guidance? Not even Satan, I am bold to think, yet indulged in the dream of an exclusive¹ chair for Peter's direction of the church as a whole; still less of a present throne in command of the 'powers that be' with a triple crown of pretensions over heaven, earth and hell. On the contrary, without a thought of these vanities of ecclesiastical ambition and most profane assumption, the apostles in love and wisdom send, to those that had received the word of God in Samaria, Peter and John. Who better qualified, were it needed, to judge and report truly? Who could be the bearer of better blessings from on high? or who in fine be more jealous for the glory of the 'one Shepherd', in dealing with these 'other sheep', which were not of the Jewish 'fold'?

1 The bare structure of the phrase in the Text. Rec. of the Greek, one article for Peter and John, joins both in a common position here. But the great uncials do not favour its insertion.

And what could more become servants of Christ when they did come down? They 'prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit'. God had hitherto withheld this, the great and characteristic privilege of the Christian. But the apostles in Jerusalem were in the current of His will and ways. And Peter and John on the spot perceived the lack and spread it out before God, not out of doubtful mind, but reckoning on His faithfulness to make good the promise of the Spirit. Even at Pentecost Peter was led to look beyond the Jews and their children to all that were afar off, as many as the Lord their God might call to Him (Acts. 2: 39). 'For as yet He was fallen upon none of them; only they had got baptized unto the name of the Lord Jesus.'

So plainly then is the situation laid before us that doubt is inexcusable. On the one hand these Samaritans believed the word, as they were also thereon baptized; on the other hand not one of them had as yet been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Jewish saints had at once received on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. Yet from the days of the so-called Fathers down to the Reformers, and hence till our own day, not merely the superstitious but men beyond most for godliness, ability, and learning, as to this seem at sea, as if they had no chart. It is indeed one of those deep blanks in traditional theology (Catholic or Protestant, Arminian or Calvinist, being here almost equally at fault), which involves incalculable loss practically as well as in spiritual intelligence, and is nowhere more felt than in the worship of God. The soul's entrance into the truth has commensurate blessing in its train, as those know who have made the transition from ignorance of this truth into the enjoyment of it.

Thus Chrysostom (Cramer's *Cat. Pat.*, iii. 136) and OEcumenius speak of the Samaritan converts receiving the Spirit for remission, but not for signs: a manifest departure from scripture which never designates the first gospel work of the Spirit in the soul as 'the gift of the Spirit', nor consequently as a question of 'reception' (comp. Acts 2: 38; Acts 19: 2).

But leaving the Fathers, one must content the reader with J. Calvin's remarks as well as Dr. J. Lightfoot's as a sufficient sample. The former are purposely cited from Beveridge's edition of the early English version given in the series of the Calvin Translation Society (*Acts i.* 338-339) 'But here ariseth a question, for he saith that they were only baptized into the name of Christ, and that therefore they had not as yet received the Holy Ghost; but baptism must either be in vain and without grace, or else it must have all the force which it hath from the Holy Ghost. In baptism we are washed from our sins; Paul teacheth that our washing is the work of the Holy Ghost (Titus 3: 5). The water used in baptism is a sign of the blood of Christ; but Peter saith that it is the Spirit by Whom we are washed with the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1: 2). Our old man is crucified in baptism that we may be raised up in newness of life (Rom. 6: 6); and whence cometh all this save only from the sanctification of the Spirit'

And finally what shall remain in baptism if it be separate from the Spirit (Gal. 3: 27)? Therefore we must not deny but that the Samaritans, who had put on Christ indeed in baptism, had also His Spirit given them (!) And surely Luke speaketh not in this place of the common grace of the Spirit whereby God doth regenerate us that we may be His children, but of these singular gifts wherewith God would have certain endued at the beginning of the gospel to beautify Christ's kingdom. Thus must the words of John be understood, that the disciples had not the Spirit given them as yet, forasmuch as Christ was yet conversant in the world; not that they were altogether destitute of the Spirit, seeing that they had from the same both faith and a godly desire to follow Christ; but because they were not furnished with these excellent gifts wherein appeared afterwards greater glory of Christ's kingdom. To conclude, forasmuch as the Samaritans were already endued with the Spirit of adoption, the excellent graces of the Spirit are heaped upon them, in which God showed to His church, for a time as it were, the visible presence of His Spirit, that He might establish for ever the authority of His gospel, and also testify that His Spirit shall be always the governor and director of the faithful.'

This is enough to show where pious and enlightened men are in general as to the truth of the Spirit and indeed of redemption also. They are not aware that the gift (δωρεά) of the Spirit, whilst over and above that communication of life which is common to all saints in Old and New Testament days, is at the same time quite distinct from the gifts (χαρίσματα) and more especially from powers and tongues, the sign-gifts which the Spirit distributed in honour of the risen Lord Jesus when inaugurating that new thing, the church, the body of Christ, here below. Nor is Christian baptism a sign of life, but rather of sins washed away and of death to sin with Christ. That is, it is a sign of salvation, the demand before God of a good conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the present clearance of a Christian, and not merely what the heir had in his nonage under law. Then was a perfectly sure promise, now there is full accomplishment for the soul (1 Peter 1: 9) which baptism expresses as a figure. But this is quite distinct from the Spirit, given to the believer as the seal of redemption and earnest of the inheritance; and this distinction in particular the great French Reformer ignored, as people do to this day. Hence in his great anxiety to guard against sacramentalism (though even here his language is unsafe and has been used for evil by the men of that school), he lowers the reception of the Spirit to transient displays of energy and thus involves himself in hopeless antagonism to scripture. The words of John 14-16 go far beyond miracles, healings, or kinds of tongues. They are to be understood of the far different presence of the Paraclete Himself, Who was to dwell with the disciples and be in them; and this is not for 'a time as it were', but to abide for ever.

The Samaritan believers were saints then, and children of God, but not yet endued with the Spirit, any more than the Old Testament saints who, though born of the Spirit, never received that great gift, which was not and could not be till redemption, when God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into hearts already renewed, crying, Abba, Father. No doubt sensible gifts then and for a while accompanied the Spirit's presence thus vouchsafed, but we err greatly if we either confound the gift with the gifts, or deny the new and abiding privilege with what all saints had before redemp

A brief extract from what our learned Dr. Lightfoot says (*Works* viii. 125-128, Pitman's edition) will suffice. 'The Holy Ghost thus given meaneth not His ordinary work of sanctification, and confirming grace; but His extraordinary gift of tongues, prophesying, and the like. And this is evident, by the meaning of that phrase, "the Holy Ghost", in the scriptures when it denoteth not exactly the person of the Holy Ghost or the third person in the Trinity.' Here again we have the same confusion of God's new and distinctive endowment of the church, the ever-abiding gift of the Holy Ghost, with the gifts, some of which took a visible form and others not. It is admitted that what is called 'sanctification of the Spirit' (1 Peter 1: 2) is different and previous; as it is that vital work of separating a soul to God

which takes place in conversion or quickening, and therefore has always been and always must be, as long as God in His grace calls sinners to Himself from among men. This typically is what answered to the washing of the unclean in the Levitical figure; then followed the application of the blood of sacrifice; and lastly the anointing oil, which only is what the New Testament designates the reception of the Spirit, wholly distinct from the new birth (which answers to the water), the blood intermediately being the token of being brought under redemption. The gifts, however important in their place, were quite subordinate, and might be some of them but temporary, though all, of course, were in full force when the Spirit was given at Pentecost.

Are Christians then grown wiser in our day? Let Dean Alford bear witness (*The Greek Test.*, fifth edit. ii. 88, 89), who, like the rest, takes advantage of the accompanying gifts, which might be seen, to ignore the incomparably more momentous unseen gift of the Holy Ghost. Further, he cites the very remarks of Calvin, as 'too important to be omitted', which we have seen to be a heap of confusion that might with justice be exposed more trenchantly still were this the task in hand. They all agree in the great error of reducing the gift of the Holy Spirit to the outward '*miraculous gifts*', instead of seeing along with these the unprecedented and transcendent privilege of Himself given to be the portion of the saints for ever. It is the more inconsistent (and error is apt to be inconsistent) in Dean Alford, inasmuch as he owns in his note on John 16: 7, '*that the gift of the Spirit at and since Pentecost was and is something TOTALLY DISTINCT from anything before that time: a new and loftier dispensation*'. His own emphasis is given as he puts it.

One of these objections is that the imposition of hands preceded that gift here as well as in Acts 19, where the apostle Paul laid his hands for a like purpose and with a like result on the twelve disciples at Ephesus. But why should this offend them? They may not like the ritualistic effort to base confirmation on a scripture which gives no real countenance to that ceremony; they may feel grieved at or ashamed of a mere form without power, they may justly censure R. Nelson (or any citing him) for untruly referring to Calvin as if he thought confirmation was instituted by the apostles. For in fact in the *Institutes* (iv. ch. 19: 76) he disproves the very thought attributed to him. But to deny that it was the Holy Spirit Himself that was communicated at Samaria and Ephesus by imposition of apostolic hands is to fly in the face of God's word; to construe it into the gifts, and not the gift, of the Spirit, is to prepare the way for the most withering unbelief and the loss of the spring of all true power. For what is the church without the personal presence of the Holy Ghost? and what is the Christian without His indwelling? That which baptizes into unity does not exist otherwise, there is no power adequate to constitute the believer a member of Christ; for both depend on the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Let it be observed that the two main occasions of that gift were to the Jewish believers (Acts 2: 4) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10: 44), on neither of which is there a word expressed or implied about Laying on of hands. Indeed one has only to weigh both accounts (Pentecost being, of course, the fullest and chief) to gather that there could be nothing of the sort on either day. The peculiar cases of Samaria and Ephesus, which some would unintelligently erect into a rule to supersede those more general, were but ancillary as events, though the blessing conferred was of course, as far as it went the same For on each of these where the laying on of hands occurred, the principle was, it would seem, to guard against rivalry, to bind the work of God together, and to put the most solemn sign of divine honour, first on the Jewish apostles, and next on the apostle to the uncircumcision. This was of moment to mark, but we do not find it repeated, save for special reasons and with other features, on Timothy personally (1 Tim. 4: 14; 2 Tim. 1: 6). But God had taken care at an early day to anticipate and cut off possible misuse by employing a disciple, not the apostle, in the very conspicuous instance of the great apostle himself (Acts 9: 17), as if to break beyond dispute all thought of a successional

chain.

It may be well also to say that the effort to make the anarthrous form mean no more than a special gift or particular operation of the Holy Spirit is not borne out by scriptural usage. For we find πνεῦμα ἅγιον employed with and without the article, so as to demonstrate that this expression in no way excludes His blessed personality, but only falls under the usual principles of the language. Where it is intended to present Him as a distinct object before the mind, the article appears, where it only characterizes, the phrase is, as ever, anarthrous. Here, to go no farther, we have πνεῦμα ἅγιον in verses 15, 17; but in 18 *to; pneu'ma*. Were it merely previous mention, we should have had the article in 17 as well as 18. The true solution, however, is not here contextual, but the intention is not to present objectively. Where this is not so, the accusative of a transitive verb is regularly without the article, as being only the complement of the notion expressed by the verb, where it is sought to present the governed word as an object before the mind, the article is added. The usage therefore is thoroughly exact. So in Acts 19: 2 we have twice πνευμα ἅγιον without the article, but in verse 6 the article in its emphatic duplication; where it seems vain to contend that the Holy Spirit is not meant in all these cases. Is there then not a difference? Unquestionably; but the difference lies, not in the contrast of a special gift with His general influence, as men say, or even with His person, but in the questioned character of what was received in the one case with the definite object before the mind in the other, most suitably accompanying such a phrase as 'came' upon the men described.

This is the true key to Acts 1: 2, 5, not the mere circumstance of the preposition (strangely supposed by some to be exceptional) which serves to define, as the phrase in verse 8 brings the Spirit into an objective point of view. But it is the self-same Spirit in each case; and could a mistake be greater than to allow that Christ only gave injunctions by a particular gift, and that the disciples enjoyed Him in all His fullness? Compare also Acts 10: 38 with 44. So, on the eventful day when the promise of the Father was fulfilled, we find in Acts 2: 4 the Spirit both without and with the article, and there according to the principle enunciated: when used to characterize what filled all, it is designedly anarthrous, when the phrase presents a distinctively objective cast of thought, the article is as correctly inserted. The presence or the absence of the article leaves the Holy Spirit untouched and only affects the aspect meant — person or power. Compare verses 17, 18, 33, 38, Acts 4: 8, 31 (a very remarkable expression in the text of the oldest codices); Acts 5: 3; Acts 6: 5; Acts 7: 55; Acts 8: 29, 39; Acts 9: 17, 31; Acts 10: 38, 44, 45, 47; Acts 11: 15, 16, 24, 28; Acts 13: 2, 4, 9, 52; Acts 15: 28; Acts 16: 6, 7. The Epistles would only add and confirm by further instances.

Thus were the Samaritans sealed of the Holy Spirit and made members of Christ in full possession of the church's privileges, no less than the saints at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost.

The sight of the blessing brought out the true condition of Simon. He was amazed, before the two apostles entered the scene, as he beheld the signs and great deeds of power wrought by Philip. Now that others from among the Samaritans received like power, Satan prompted his unrenewed mind to evil.

'Now Simon, when he saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, offered them money, saying, Give me also this power that, on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive [the] Holy Ghost. But Peter said to him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou thoughtest to obtain the gift of God through money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and beseech the Lord if so be the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee, for I see that thou art in gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. And Simon said in answer, Beseech ye for me with the Lord that none of the things which

ye have spoken come upon me' (vers. 18-24).

Undoubtedly there was somewhat to be 'seen' but this does not hinder the truth that the Spirit was being given inwardly, and not merely 'gifts', still less only what men call the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. They, however, point to the fact that this was through the imposition of the hands of the apostles. But why should not God give the Spirit thus if He pleased? It is for Him to judge His own best methods; and God, Who gave the Spirit at Pentecost without the laying on of hands, was pleased now to honour the apostles as the channel. It is a question of His wisdom as well as sovereignty. For mere bishops to imitate the form without the power is without any basis of truth, and is real presumption. Simon saw, in fact, a means of self-exaltation, perhaps also of gain. Certainly he offered them money, saying, 'Give me also this power that, on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit.' What an insult to God! What is bought with money may naturally be sold for money. But this divine gift, was it to be a matter of traffic among men?

It is a mistake to suppose that Simon wanted the gift for himself. He wished to buy the power of conferring the Holy Spirit upon others. It is very possible, however, that he may not have received the outward gift even for himself, assuredly he was not sealed of the Holy Ghost, which, as we have seen, implies the new birth previously. And Simon manifests not a thought or feeling in communion with God. He was just a natural man, and a man even debased by all his former ways and character, especially those which profanely abused the name of God. The truth he had heard could never have judged his conscience or reached his heart. It was rather stupefaction in presence of transcendent power, and the keen desire to appropriate this power to his own selfish purposes. He judged, as man habitually does, from himself; not, as the believer does, from God. As money is the great means among men, he supposed it must be so with the apostles. Christ was nothing in his eyes; the power that eclipsed his own was desirable to obtain at any price. This was all that he conceived of the Holy Spirit; and it proved in the most conclusive manner where his own soul was.

Simon's offer filled Peter with indignation, who said to him, 'Thy money perish with thee, because thou thoughtest to obtain the gift of God with money.' Christ alone is the procuring cause, and those alone who rest on His blood by faith receive it. The word of Simon betrayed his ruin. He was, as yet, a lost man. There was no real faith, and consequently no salvation in his case. Baptism is an admirable sign where there is life and faith, without these, it is a most solemn aggravation of man's natural guilt and ruin. It is to perish with a Saviour in sight, with sin and God's judgment slighted as well as the Saviour. Simon had no share nor lot in this matter, for his heart was not right before God. This does not mean, in my judgment, a lack of share or lot in the sign-gifts but in the Saviour: the gospel was nothing to him. Had the word of truth reached him, his heart would have been purified by faith, for the grace of God is adequate to save the vilest. But no heart visited by grace could have thought of offering money in order to obtain the power of giving the Holy Spirit. Simon was self-convicted of total strangership to God and His grace. The heart of man, though a baptized man, was as perverse as ever, and had broken out into a more daring sin than was possible before. Outward nearness to grace is of all things the most fatal to him who is not subject to the truth of God.

Yet, as he had taken the place of professing the name of the Lord, Peter calls on him to 'repent'. Repentance is the clear duty and imperative call of God for a sinful man. It was always an obligation since the fall; but the gospel, as it sheds a brighter light upon man's need, so furnishes the mightiest motives to act upon the heart. 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' The highest of duties, then, is to own and honour the Son of God, confessing one's own sins, which brought Him, in divine love, to the cross. On the other hand, he that believes in the Son has everlasting life; whilst he that disobeys

the Son, not subject to Him now fully revealed, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

Hence the apostle adds, 'Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and beseech the Lord if so be the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee, for I see that thou art in gall of bitterness and in bond of iniquity.' That there is grace in God and efficacy in the blood of Christ to meet any wickedness of man is certain. Peter would have never thus exhorted him had pardon been an impossibility. But the answer of Simon clearly shows that, though alarmed for the moment, there was no sense in his soul of his shameless sin against God and especially against the Holy Spirit; no real reckoning upon grace in God, according to the revelation of Himself in the death of His Son. Peter did not say, 'Beseech' God, but 'the Lord', for in Him and by Him only can God deliver a guilty soul; and now that He has sent His Son, the only sure and adequate way of honouring the Father is in honouring the Son. 'He that confesseth the Son hath the Father also.' Confessing the Father only, not the Son, neither saves the sinner nor glorifies God. So here Peter calls on him to beseech the Lord, Who is 'the way and the truth, and the life'. But there was no faith any more than repentance in Simon, who said in answer, 'Beseech ye (it is emphatic) for me with the Lord, that none of the things which ye have spoken come upon me.'

There was confidence, if we can so say, in the channels of power. He who had no faith in Christ confesses his faith in Peter; as millions since have done in saints, angels, or the virgin Mary. This, however, is not really faith but credulity and superstition; for it has no ground, either in the nature of the persons, or in the word of God. Faith in the Lord Jesus has alone a divine resting-place, for God sent Him, His only-begotten Son, into the world that we might live through Him — through none other but Him. 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as propitiation for our sins.' To all this truly divine and infinite salvation Simon was insensible. But he saw in Peter an instrument of power, without faith in the word he and Philip had preached; and so he entreats the apostles to pray to the Lord for him so that none of the things spoken might befall him. It was future consequences he dreaded, not his present state of ruin and guilt that he felt. Thenceforward, according to scripture, he disappears from our sight; and none could wonder if the worst evil came on the impenitent man. But the reticence of Luke did not suit the ecclesiastical historians who to their own shame detail for their readers accounts which bear the stamp of fable in honour of Peter. And where is the Lord in all this? Wounded, we may say, as so often, in the house of His friends.

But we have a brief word added as to the two apostles. 'They therefore, when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, returned¹ to Jerusalem and evangelized¹ many villages of the Samaritans' (ver. 25). It was not a mere transient act, as the common text has it, but a continuous work. Their hearts were toward the Lord, Who had created in them a right and fervent spirit, and needed no entreaty to spread amongst small and great the glad tidings of His redemption. The villages of the Samaritans, and many of them, were not beneath the detailed and repeated labours of the apostles.

¹ The most ancient and best copies present here the imperfect, not the mere historical tense or aorist, as in the Text. Rec. following the inferior authorities.

We have next the history of Philip's evangelistic service resumed, and full of interest and instruction it is.

'But an angel of [the] Lord spake to Philip, saying, Arise, go southward unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza; this is desert. And he arose and went. And behold a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch in power under Candace, queen of [the] Ethiopians, who was over all her treasure,¹ had come to worship at Jerusalem; and he was returning and, as he sat in his chariot,¹ was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, Approach and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip

running up heard him reading the prophet Isaiah,¹ and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I unless some one shall guide¹ me? And he besought Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the scripture which he was reading was this —

1 Ap.m. Cp.m. Dp.m. followed by the Vulg. and the Sah. omit ὄς (27) though almost all others seem to insert it. It is one of those readings which affect the sense infinitesimally, yet as to which much might be argued on either side. So with other variations in vers. 28, 30, 31, 33, where the numeral is put.

As a sheep He was led to slaughter;

And as a lamb dumb before his shearer,

So He openeth not His mouth.

In His¹ humiliation His judgment was taken away.

His¹ generation who shall declare?

For His life was taken away from the earth.

'And the eunuch answering Philip said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? Of himself or of some other (ἐτέρου)? And Philip opened his mouth, and, beginning from this scripture, preached to him Jesus. And as they went on the way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, Behold water: what hindereth me to be baptized?² And he commanded the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. But when they came up out of the water, [the] Spirit of [the] Lord caught away Philip, and the eunuch saw him no more, for he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus, and passing through he evangelized all the cities till he came unto Caesarea' (vers. 26-40).

2 The great authorities ABCHLP, with more than eighty cursives, the most ancient Latin copies, Pesh-Syr. Sah. Memph., excepting Laud's MS. 35, do not read ver. 37, which seems from internal evidence also to be spurious. For 'the Son of God' would have been a wonderful step in advance, as we see really in Saul, Acts 9: 20, but here as decidedly out of keeping with the Ethiopian's ignorance, as with the development of the history. It was an early interpolation; and we need not wonder that those capable of the deed failed in spiritual apprehension of the truth, and overshot the mark.

A fresh step is taken by Philip. Jehovah's angel directs him; for there were two roads, and an evangelist would not have chosen the one that was a desert.³ But the object of God's grace was travelling by this one; and an angel is employed as ever in God's providence, here objectively that we might not forget the truth or take account only of thoughts and feelings. 'Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth for service on account of those that inherit salvation?' The ready servant of God's will, Philip leaves the rejoicing multitude to whom he had been blessed in Samaria, and goes promptly, though he only knows the seemingly strange direction of his journey, not as yet its aim. It was a proselyte returning from Jerusalem, unsatisfied but wistful and groping his way in the prophetic word. The blessing is not now in the city of solemnities, the Blessor had been driven away. Samaria is rejoicing in the Saviour of the world. The Ethiopian is soon to stretch out his hands to God, not in prayer only but in praise and conscious blessedness, though Ethiopia must wait till He comes Who is already ascended on high and has led captivity captive. But here it is not an angel but 'the Spirit' that said to Philip, Approach and join thyself to this chariot. Angels have to do with circumstances, the Spirit leads as to souls. So we saw in Acts 5; and so we may see yet more clearly in comparing Acts 12 with Acts 13. The reality is as true now as ever, though it was then manifested and is written in

God's word that we be not faithless but believing.

3 All can see that the reference may be to Gaza, rather than to one of two roads which is designated 'desert'. And Strabo is cited in confirmation of the former thought, which seems to have been the opinion of the A.V. if not of the Revisers though both might be understood of the way as easily as of the town. Not so Mr. T. S. Green, who renders the clause, 'This road is a lone one'.

With alacrity the evangelist answers to the Spirit's call, and runs to Candace's treasurer as he sat in the chariot reading Isaiah, and puts the searching question, Understandest thou what thou readest? Alas! it was then as now in Christendom. The vision of Him Who came to make God known, otherwise unknowable, is handed about from learned to unlearned, as if the divine solution of all riddles were itself the one insoluble riddle. The learned man, when asked to read, says, I cannot; for it is sealed, and on the same appeal the unlearned excuses himself, I am not learned. Faith alone can understand: so it is, and so it ought to be. So it was now that grace took up the returning stranger; for the passage was Isa. 53: 7, 8; and when the answer betrayed his sheer ignorance of the gospel, Philip let him hear the glad tidings of Jesus.

It was not without God that the then passage of Isaiah set out the holy suffering Messiah. Other parts of this very strain, both before and after bear witness to His exaltation; but here it is sufferings simply — the main difficulty to a Jew, who thought exclusively of His glorious kingdom. Hence the propriety of the name of 'Jesus' in Philip's application of the prophecy (ver. 35): the more striking because the inspiring Spirit had said (ver. 5) that Philip proclaimed 'the Christ' or Messiah to the Samaritans. Ignorance, learned or unlearned, slights these distinctions, censures those who point them out as refining on scripture, and thus really loses the force of the truth. For God hath not written one word in vain; and spiritual intelligence gleans its sweetest fruit in that too neglected field. The Samaritans needed to hear that the Christ was come: the Ethiopian, to know that the despised and suffering Jesus was beyond doubt the Messiah, whom the prophet introduced with a trumpet note as lofty in Isa. 52: 13, as that which closed the passage in Isa. 53: 12. Everywhere are bound together His sufferings and His glories after these, but nowhere more than here do we find His meek submission to the wanton cruelty of His guilty people. Now 'Jesus' was the right word for this, for on the one hand it expresses what He became in manhood so as to be the object of contempt to rebellious creatures, and on the other it tells out His intrinsic glory Who for us stooped so low. He was Jehovah the Saviour.

The difference in the language from the Old Testament in our hands is due to the Septuagint, or Greek Version then in common use, and especially among the Egyptians and others. The sense remains substantially the same. But we are not to infer that Philip confined himself to this scripture: that he 'began' from it more justly implies and warrants that he did not end there but expounded others also. But this was of extreme importance to one in the state of soul which the whole preceding account gives us to see in the treasurer, and it was blessed to the letting in of a flood of divine light into his heart.

Yet the scripture which detected the darkness of the Ethiopian's mind before Philip sounded the glad tidings of Jesus in his ears that he by faith might ever after be a child of light in the Lord, has fared ill, not merely at the hands of the Fathers of old, but hardly less with Calvin and the like in Reformation times and since. For the great French commentator (to dwell on no others) will have these verses to teach that our Lord was so broken that He appears like a man dejected beyond hope, as is evident, but also that He comes out of the depth of death as a conqueror, and out of hell itself as the author of eternal life.

But to draw this last sense from the words cited in verse 33 (or from the original in Isa. 53: 8) is

quite unfounded. The prophet is as far as possible from here saying that Christ should be lifted up from His great straits by the hand of the Father. This is in no way taught by His judgment being taken away. The new beginning of unlooked-for glory is found elsewhere, but not here. Nor does the exclamation of the prophet in the following clause ('His generation who shall declare?') import that His victory shall go beyond all number of years, instead of lasting only a little. Sundry old interpreters were not justified in proving hereby the eternal generation of the Word, any more than others who understood it of His miraculous Incarnation. But no perversion seems worse than the deduction from such words as these that Christ's life shall endure for ever, for the entire passage refers exclusively to His humiliation.

The first clause of v. 33 appears to express the mockery of all righteousness in His judgment, the second, the unspeakable wickedness of that generation, the third, the violent end of His life on earth to which He bowed, which is its proof. Were it a question of Phil. 2: 6-11, or of the whole section (52: 13 - 53), and not of these two verses only, Calvin would have been right as now he is demonstrably wrong. And this is confirmed by the Hebrew, which here no more admits of a thought of exaltation than does the Greek. The suffering Messiah is seen only in Jesus, at all cost to Himself the Saviour of the sinful man who believes in Him, let His own people gainsay as they may the blessed report of the faithful

Baptism follows the hearing of faith. And thus, when they come upon a certain water, the stranger asks what hinders his being baptized, and has the privilege conferred on the spot. So Peter asked, in Cornelius' house, if any one could forbid it, when the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit, even as the believing Jews before them. For the outer mark, worse than worthless without the heart's subjection to the Lord and His grace, has its importance in ways neither few nor small; as the loss of the truth represented is as manifest in those that despise, as in those that idolize it. They fail to see that life is never attributed to baptism, but salvation is set forth in it, the washing away of sins, and death to sin, the blessed portion to which the gospel bears witness in Christ dead and risen for the believer.

Life the Old Testament saints had, when there was no such thing as Christian baptism. Abel and Abram had it, no less than the Christian; but the Christian by virtue of Christ's accomplished work has soul-salvation, as he waits for his body to be saved and changed at Christ's coming. Of this salvation meanwhile, which no Old Testament saint could have, baptism is the sign, to which therefore the believer now submits, as a confession not only that Jesus is Lord, but of deliverance through His death and resurrection. Those who make all subjective, like the Friends, or who make all objective like the Catholics, suffer the consequence of their errors. Neither one nor other owns dogmatically the true present privilege of the Christian as in Christ delivered from all condemnation, freed from the law of sin and death, perfected for ever by the one offering of Christ. This truth to the Quaker and the Papist is dangerous doctrine, both holding, though on different grounds, that whoever is justified is sanctified, and that, as far as he is sanctified, he is so far justified, and no further. Both therefore slight the word of God, and preaching, and faith; as both are wholly ignorant of the gift of the Spirit sealing the believer to the day of redemption, the one crying up ordinances and priesthood to the glorification of the church, the other resting for all on what he calls the inward light, which he contends is given to every man, Jew or heathen, Mahommedan or Christian, whose destiny for ever turns on the use he makes of it. Neither allows eternal life in Christ to faith; neither sees founded on Christ's work, that quittance of our old state as children of Adam, and entrance into the new state of the Second Man, of which baptism is not the channel but the emblem. Hence they ignore, if they do not falsify even in quotation, such scriptures as Col. 1: 12, 13. They are striving to be made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; they are hoping to be translated into the kingdom of the Son of His

love. Had they read baptism aright, they would be rejoicing in the sense of a present and everlasting deliverance to the praise of Him in Whom they believe.

If true, they are certainly feeble, believers. With the Ethiopian all was simple and assured. For they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him (ver. 38). There was no thought of going before the assembly in Samaria. Baptism is individual, no matter how many souls might be baptized. The church has nothing to do with it. The Lord directed His servants (not the church as such) to baptize; and for this they are responsible to Him, as they are for the preaching of the word. The church does not baptize, any more than preach and teach; the evangelist does, though he may ask another to do it for him, as Peter when he directed Cornelius and the rest to be baptized in the name of the Lord on a later day.

'And when they came up out of the water, [the] Spirit of [the] Lord caught away Philip, and the eunuch saw him no more, for he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus, and passing through he evangelized all the cities till he came to Caesarea' (vers. 39, 40). The miracle only established the new convert's faith, as doubtless it was wrought of God to do; for there is not a hint that Philip wished it, still less sought it in prayer. It was God for the honour of His Son in virtue of that Spirit's power which was working on earth; but surely not without a wise and gracious intent for the witness of it (and he was not alone) returning to his native land with the gospel of salvation. Abyssinia was thus to have the glad tidings of God concerning His Son; as Philip transported to Azotus (or Ashdod) abides the same simple-hearted indefatigable preacher of divine grace (ver. 40). For passing through he was evangelizing all the cities till he came to Caesarea. It is there the inspired history shows him to have lived, and his four daughters, long afterwards (Acts 21: 8).

Acts 9

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus follows in beautiful development of the ways of God. For on the one hand his murderous unflinching zeal against the Lord Jesus and His saints made him (arrested by sovereign grace and heavenly glory, in the person of Christ shining into his heart from on high) to be so much the more conspicuous witness of the gospel; on the other hand his call immediately thereon to go as His apostle to the Gentiles was a new and distinct departure of ministry to the praise of divine mercy. For the blood of Stephen, far from quenching the raging enthusiasm of the young zealot 'consenting to his death' had only stimulated him to dare unsparing violence against all men and women who called on the Lord's name; and now his unsatisfied zeal against 'the way' induced him to chase the fleeing scattered saints outside the land.

'But Saul, still breathing threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked of him letters unto Damascus to the synagogues; so that, if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring [them] bound unto Jerusalem. And as he was journeying, it came to pass that he drew near to Damascus, and suddenly there shone round him a light out of heaven, and faring upon the earth he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And He¹ [said], I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest¹, but arise and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men that journeyed with him were standing speechless, hearing the sound but seeing no one. And Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing²; but leading by the hand they brought him into Damascus; and he was three days without seeing, and did neither eat nor drink;' (vers. 1-9).

1 The Text. Rec. on inferior authority adds first 'Lord said', then an interpolation from Acts 26

'[it is] hard for thee to kick against goads', and an exaggerated form in the first half of ver. 6 of the first clause of Acts 22: 10.

2 Or, 'no one', which is the reading of most authorities, some of them ancient and good, though Ap.m. B Vulg. Syrr. Sah., *et al.*, give the broader sense of the neuter. It may help some to notice the objective or historical fact in this expression, as compared with the subjective state in the last clause of ver. 7 and the first of verse 9: objective again in the latter part of 9.

Thus wonderfully was the chief persecutor called, not as saint only but as apostle also. The conversion of the dying robber was a signal display of suited though sovereign grace; that of the living pursuer of the saints to prison or death was higher far. And if Peter followed the rejected Christ from Galilee to His ascension and heavenly glory, Saul began with His call out of heaven till, himself ever afterwards a partaker of His sufferings, he finished his course in becoming conformed to His death. He was apostle, not through the living Messiah on earth, but through Him glorified after God the Father raised Him from the dead. He began his witness where Peter ended it on his part.

Saul's was an unprecedented starting-point, which gave another and heavenly character to his service. There was a complete breach with Israel after the flesh, no longer a question of the earth or earthly hopes. Man risen from among the dead and gone on high has no connection with one nation more than another. The cross broke off all possible claims of those who had the law; but therein also was laid the righteous ground for the forgiveness of all trespasses, for taking out of the way the hostile bond written in ordinances. Heavenly associations with Christ glorified were now revealed as a present fact for faith to apprehend, enjoy, and make manifest practically on earth; and of this, both individually and corporately, Saul was chosen to be a witness as none other had ever been before; and therein none followed, for the case admitted of no succession.

This was the man who, brimful of deadly hatred, desired the highest religious sanction for war unto death against all men or women that called on the Lord Jesus. Armed with the high priest's letter he approached Damascus, when suddenly light out of heaven flashed round him, and fallen to the earth he heard a voice charging him with persecuting Him Whom he could not own to be the Lord; and the astonished Saul learns to his utter confusion before God that it was Jesus, Jesus persecuted in His own, who were one with Him. Overwhelming discoveries for any soul! For the light, 'the glory of that light,' the power, the voice even to him were unmistakable altogether; and the more so, for one like Saul confidently and conscientiously embittered against His name, thinking he was doing good service if he captured or even killed His disciples: so stout certainly his will, so ardent his zeal, so unsuspecting his malice, through blinding religious prejudice.

Never was a conversion so stamped with heavenly glory (2 Cor. 4: 4) and this from the person of Christ speaking thence (Heb. 12: 25). It was emphatically the saving 'grace of God' that appeared to him, in total and manifest overthrow of the highest earthly tradition, though it was also the 'glad tidings (or gospel) of Christ's glory', as not another even of the apostles could say like himself. Hence he speaks of 'my' gospel, and when joining others of his companions, 'our' gospel. It was not as if there was any object or any saving means before the soul but the one Saviour and Lord; but so it was from heavenly character, as well as the fullness and sovereignty of grace, therein manifested beyond all.

Besides, in Christ's words, from that first revelation, lay the germ of the doctrine of the assembly as one with Himself, His body, which the apostle was called to expound and enforce by his Epistles, as by his ministerial work and life, in a way and measure that surpassed 'the twelve', however honoured in their place. And this peculiar manner, as well as heavenly development of the truth, of which the Lord makes him the pre-eminent witness, brought on him unparalleled trial and suffering,

from not only without but even from within, as his own writings and others abundantly prove.

Saul was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Judaism and the world were to his soul judged and abandoned for ever by the certainty of saving grace and heavenly glory in Christ on high Who now manifestly exercised divine power and authority, and at one glance pointed out the new and only true path of patient suffering for the witness, in word and deed, of grace and truth, according to His own matchless way on earth, till He come and take us to Himself where He is. On the one hand, not only the Gentiles (Romans, Greeks, and all others) were fighting against God, but yet more keenly the chosen nation, the Jews; on the other hand, the simplest disciple now is one with Christ on the throne of God, and to persecute them is to persecute Him.

This and far more such a mind as Saul's read in the revelation outside Damascus — a revelation to go forth in due time over all the earth, and have its power only in faith and love forming a Christlike life to Christ's glory, but not without notable effects even where it was ever so hollowly professed. It may be drowned in blood or obscured with clouds of creature error and presumption, Jewish or Gentile, or worse than either when both combine to deny the Father and the Son; but none the less in its objects it will rise in heaven with ever durable and unfading glory around Christ, ere He shall be revealed from heaven with angels of His might in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know not God and those that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in that day, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and wondered at in all that believed, as well as to be alike the Blessor and the Blessing to all the families of the earth according to promise (2 Thess. 1: 7-10).

It will be noticed that the first effect on his believing and repentant soul was the spirit of obedience. Life was there through faith, and this as ever instantly shows its true character by obedience, which the Lord saw. It is assumed in the latter half of the Text. Rec. which forms the whole of verse 6, 'But rise up and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.' He lets us know in his own account to the Jews (Acts 22: 10) that he had said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' This the inspired historian does not cite here, though he gives it later where it was of importance. But in any case the Lord counts on obedience, even before Saul could be supposed to appreciate dogmatically, and to rest in peace on, the sprinkling of His blood. The new nature lives in obedience, such as Christ's, in the consciousness and affections of sonship, and that blood cleanses from every sin of which the old man was guilty. Even before the new-born soul knows clearance from all guilt, the heart is made up to obey, not through fear of penalty like a Jew with death before his eyes, but attracted by sovereign goodness and submission to God's word. Obedience is the only right place and attitude of the renewed mind, in contrast with the independence of God natural to man shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin. Power comes in the gift of the Holy Ghost, when the believer rests on redemption and knows all his evilness before God. But even an apostle must be told, not himself discover, what he must do.

'The men that journeyed with Saul were standing speechless, hearing the sound but beholding no one' (ver. 7). The word often means 'voice', as it is rightly translated in verse 4, where Saul clearly heard what the Lord said to him. Here his companions did not hear one word articulately, as we are distinctly told in Acts 22: 9. Yet they did hear that something was being uttered. Hence 'sound' appears to be a more accurate representation of the fact intended by the expression. And this is confirmed by a nice difference in the form of the Greek phrase; for the genitive (expressive of partition) is used where the physical effect was incomplete, the accusative where the words were sent home in power. In spiritual reception the genitive is always used; for who among men could be said to have heard in full what the voice of the Son of God imports?

On rising up Saul proved to be without power to see, blinded, we may well say, with excessive light. So they led him by the hand into Damascus (ver. 8), and for three days without seeing he did neither eat nor drink (ver. 9). A deep work thus went on in a soul capable of feeling grace and truth as profoundly as he could judge himself according to the light of God, which had exposed the vain wickedness of formalism in its best shape, and brought down the zealous missionary, armed with inquisitorial power, where Job of old was brought — to abhor self in dust and ashes.

Thus was brought to pass a conversion of the highest character and the deepest interest, pregnant with widespread results never to pass away. The miracle found its justification, not only in the moral principles of the case or in the dispensational display at that point in God's ways, but especially in the all-importance of such a heavenly revelation of His Son. Nevertheless Saul, when converted, though designated to a ministry which transcends that of every other man, enters the sphere of Christian confession by the same lowly portal as any other.

'Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I [am here], Lord. And the Lord [said] unto him, Rise up, and go to the lane that is called Straight, and seek in Judas' house one of Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he prayeth and hath seen in a vision¹ a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands¹ on him, so that he might receive his sight. And Ananias answered, Lord, I heard² from many of this man, how much evil he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem, and here he hath authority from the high priests to bind all that call on Thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go, for he is a vessel of election to Me, to bear My name before both³ Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel; for I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake. And Ananias went and entered into the house; and laying his hands upon him he said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus that appeared to thee in the way which thou camest hath sent me, so that thou mightest receive sight and be filled with [the] Holy Spirit. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he received sight,' and rising up he was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened' (vers. 10-19).

1 ἐν ὁράματι 'in a vision', though given by most MSS. and Vv. finds no support in A61 Vulg. Sah. Memph. Aeth. There are also several changes of order in the words in these verses, and the oldest MSS. incline to the plural form of 'hands' where the Text. Rec. after most has the singular.

2 The perfect has most MSS., but the more ancient give the aorist.

3 τε 'both' ABCE, eight cursives, *et al.*, but τῶν is wrongly added by B Cp.m.

There is much to learn from the connection of Ananias with the new convert, total strangers to each other as they had been, save that the former well knew by public rumour of the latter's fierce enmity to all who called on the name of the Lord. He was himself a devout man according to the law, of unimpeachably good report among the Israelites of Damascus (Acts 22: 12). Such was the man who had a vision of the Lord about Saul, as Saul had about Ananias: both corroborative, in the most simple and important way, of the miracle put forth on the occasion of Saul's conversion. If we see sometimes an economy of divine power, here the dullest cannot but own a striking affluence; as indeed the end in view was most worthy. For in the testimony of the fresh witness were developed the displays of grace and truth, of the gospel and of the church, of individual Christianity and of corporate blessedness, of the deepest truth for man's soul, of the fullest vindication of divine righteousness, of past wisdom in God's ways manifested, of future counsels of glory for heaven and earth and eternity to the praise of God and His Son: the grounds of all this and more were first laid out, as they had never been before and never need to be again. Who, acquainted with God's ways in His word, can wonder at the special pains taken to furnish outward vouchers of unusual fullness and of unquestionable force, so as to

preclude all reasonable imputation of delusion on the one hand or of collusion on the other? The Lord has here seen to this remarkably: let us not overlook it.

Ananias had communications from the Lord (vers. 10-12), which even in vision drew out the expression of his extreme surprise. Nor can there be conceived a more exquisite unfolding of the free intercourse which grace has now opened between the heart of the Master in heaven and that of the servant on earth. Ananias on one side ventures respectfully even to the verge of remonstrance (vers. 13, 14), after being told to seek Saul at Judas' house and recover his sight; as the Lord on the other overrules all reluctance by the assurance not only of His own abounding grace, but of Saul's genuine repentance fitting him for the wonderful work to which he was henceforth called (vers. 15, 16). How entirely then may we not pour out our exercises of heart into His bosom, how implicitly count on His loving interest, Who has all things at His disposal, and interests Himself in our history from first to last! For His eye of love is on the praying at such a house in such a street, no less than on the vast sweep of Christian life and service from Arabia to Damascus, from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum, yea to Rome if not Spain, where His own name would be borne before both nations and kings and sons of Israel, when the many doings of Saul over the world of that day would be less than his many sufferings for Christ's name. Truly he was a vessel of election to the Lord, in labours of love most abundant, in sufferings for Christ yet more unparalleled.

1 'Forthwith' is here added in Text. Rec., but very high authority excludes the word, which is needless.

Ananias promptly obeys, goes to the house where Saul lodged, and, laying his hands on him, told out the errand on which he was sent, not only to restore Saul's sight but that he should be filled with the Spirit. The force of the message lay in this that the Lord Jesus, Who appeared to Saul in the way, now sent Ananias supernaturally to convey His blessing. How evident that God was at work, and that the Lord Jesus was the revealer of His mind and the medium of His mercy, as He is the effulgence of His glory and the expression of His subsistence; not more surely man than God, and now the Man glorified at His right hand Who searches the reins and hearts, and controlled Ananias no less than Saul! If the vanity of man in his best estate was manifest to Saul's conscience (and no man had such reason as he to know this experimentally), the grace of God in the Lord Jesus was equally evident. 'And immediately there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he received sight, and rising up he was baptized, and he took food and was strengthened.' Saul submitted to baptism like any other. He was baptized by a simple disciple; and he himself subsequently taught others to lay no stress on his own baptizing anyone (1 Cor. 1: 14-17).

'I thank God I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius (he wrote to the vain Corinthians), 'lest any should say that I had baptized in my own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas; besides I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.' The proclamation of the truth is far beyond the administration of its sign. So we shall see that Peter preached at Caesarea, but consigned to others the baptizing of Cornelius with his kinsmen and his near friends. Indeed the same thing appears here; for nothing would have been easier than to have employed an official, at least a 'deacon', if this had been desirable in God's sight, Who surely has no pleasure in breaking down His own order. A 'disciple' baptizes the great apostle of the Gentiles.

But the most striking fact in all the transaction is the gift of the Spirit through Ananias, so decidedly did the wisdom of God in Saul's case break through the ordinary method of conferring the Spirit through the hands of an apostle, if, for special reasons, hands were employed at all. Here the

utmost care was taken to mark God laying all human pretensions in the dust. The employment of a disciple like Ananias lays the axe to the root of official pride; and this where the Lord was calling out the most honoured servant He ever deigned to use.

There is another remark to note of still more general importance, which the history of Saul's conversion brings into evidence. We must not confound, as popular preachers and teachers do, the reception of life and salvation. Life is always given immediately; not so salvation. Saul was quickened the moment he believed in the Lord Jesus. But this is quite distinct from what scripture calls 'salvation'; and hence we see, in the state of Saul, during the intermediate three days, a plain testimony to this important difference.

What searchings of heart! What deep questions were discussed in his soul during those days and nights, when he neither ate nor drank! Yet divine life was there all the while as truly as afterwards, faith too in the word of God, and in His glory Who had smitten him down and revealed Himself to him and in him. But was this peace with God? Was it rest? Was he delivered consciously from all condemnation? Salvation is found in believing the gospel which presents the work of Christ in all its fullness as God's answer to every difficulty of the conscience and heart. It is not therefore, a mere confiding in the Lord for ultimate safety, but present deliverance enjoyed by the soul. Into this Saul was now brought. It is a great mistake therefore to talk of 'salvation in a moment', 'deliverance on the spot', or any other of the stock phrases of superficial revivalism, which ignore the word of God and spring from the confusion of life with salvation. After truly looking to the person of Christ with its soul-subduing power, a deep process habitually goes on in renewed souls, who are not satisfied with 'life for a look', but face the overwhelming discovery of not only all they have done, but all they are in its evil and enmity against God and His Son. Self is thus judged in the light, and humiliation is produced, without which there can be no solid and settled peace. In the style of preaching referred to this is slurred over to the danger and injury of souls, quite as much as to the slighting of the full truth so due to Christ's glory.

1 Calvin apparently sees only terror, and makes the abstinence part of the miracle. Can one conceive a stranger absence of spiritual perception?

And therein also is seen the practical importance of distinguishing the new birth of the Spirit from the gift of the Spirit, as we have repeatedly pointed out in expounding this Book. The one goes with our believing on the Lord, when first arrested by God's word in the midst of open sins or of proud self-righteousness; the other is, when the soul (ploughed up by the word and learning its hopeless evil before God, humbled as well as troubled, yet not without hope, for Christ is believed in) finds in His all-efficacious work Who for him died and rose, that his evil is all gone, root and branch and fruit, and that he is in Christ, a child of God and joint-heir with Christ, yea, dead and risen with Him, and so freed from all that can be against him that he might live unto God.

Of this, burial with Christ is the instituted symbol to which every Christian submits; salvation is the expression of its standing privilege. Hence in his First Epistle (1 Peter 3: 21) Peter brings in the comparison with Noah's ark, and the passing through the waters of death as the way of salvation; so Christ died personally and efficaciously for our sins, as we in spirit when baptized. The apostle carefully distinguishes between the mere outward effect of the water, and points to the true power in Christ's death and resurrection, of which baptism is the figure. Expressly, however, it is a figure, not of life, but of salvation, present salvation of souls; as we await the coming of the Lord for the salvation of our bodies when we shall be like Him even outwardly, seeing Him as He is.

Calvin will have it that Ananias laid hands on Saul, partly to consecrate him to God [from the

context one gathers, ministerially], partly to obtain for him the gifts of the Spirit. It would not be worth noticing in general, for both are absolutely wrong, but the errors of great and good men are proportionately dangerous. The blessed man says of himself, 'Paul, apostle not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father Who raised Him up from among the dead' (Gal. 1: 1). Nor can we too vigilantly reject the error that confounds the gift (δωρεᾶ) of the Spirit, or, we may add, the being filled with the Holy Spirit, with 'the gifts' (χαρίσματα). Nor does it appear afterwards by the narrative that Ananias was also commanded to teach him, any more than this was implied in his subsequently baptizing him. How ready even the excellent of the earth to let slip, or add to, and so spoil, the holy deposit of the truth! It would rather appear that Ananias laid hands on Saul to cure his blindness, before he was baptized; after which he was filled with the Holy Spirit, without a hint of any such act subsequent to baptism.

Thus simply is brought before us the call and conversion of the great apostle, containing within the account itself the germ of that which was to be unfolded in his Epistles and called out by the demands of the work which mostly gave occasion to the Epistles.

It may be noticed that to bear Christ's name before Gentiles has the first place, the sons of Israel being put last, with 'kings' placed between them. He was to be 'apostle of Gentiles' (Rom. 11: 13). For this, the call of the Lord from heaven was most appropriate. On earth He had sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. When He sends from heaven, Israel ceases to have any such place. All mankind, before this, had joined and been lost in one common guilt. The Jews had even led the Gentiles to crucify Him. Israel's superiority after the flesh was therefore clean gone. Sovereign grace alone governs henceforth; and therefore, if any are to be prominently named, it is rather those who are most needy. Of such Saul was characteristically apostle.

'And he¹ was certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And immediately in the synagogues he preached Jesus,² that He is the Son of God. And all that heard [him] were amazed and said, Is not this he that in Jerusalem made havoc of those that called on this name, and had³ come hither for this thing, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in power and confounded the³ Jews that dwelt in Damascus, proving that this is the Christ' (vers. 19-22).

1 The Text. Rec. on inferior authority adds 'Saul'.

2 It is 'Jesus' in ABCE, sixteen cursives, Vulg. Syrr. Memph, *et al.* One of the Aeth, has 'Jesus' only, the other 'Jesus Christ'.

3 Most copies but not the best have the perfect in ver. 21. Only p.m. B omit the article in ver. 22. Other minute differences may be left.

Hence we have a new departure of at least equal importance. From the very first Saul proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of God. This gave a new and higher character to the preaching.

The other apostles knew it but are not said to have preached it. Peter had long ago confessed the great truth with singular strength, and the Lord had pronounced him thereon blessed; for flesh and blood had not revealed it to him but His Father, that is in heaven (Matt. 16: 16, 17). Yet do we never find Peter preaching or proclaiming the Lord thus at Pentecost and afterwards. He sets forth the crucified Jesus as having been made both Lord and Christ. He dwells on His death, resurrection, and ascension. He represents Him as from heaven pouring forth the Holy Ghost, having received of the Father that promised gift. The greatest prominence is given to Jesus as the now glorified Servant of the God of Israel, exalted by God's right hand as Leader and Saviour to give repentance to Israel and

remission of sins. Peter preached Him thus fully, but only as the Messiah, Whom His people had rejected, Whom God had raised from the dead and would send from heaven in due time, to bring down all promised blessing. Beyond this he does not preach Christ, so far as the Book of Acts teaches.

Stephen went beyond this at any rate in his last discourse. 'Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.' Anyone familiar with the Psalms and the Prophets ought to have discovered, at least by the light of the New Testament, the import of this new title. It opens out assuredly a far larger glory for the Lord than the realm of Israel. The Son of man is set over, not all mankind only, but all creation, He only being excepted (which shows its immense range) Who set all things under Him. In Psalm 8: 5 it is intimated that His humiliation unto death was the ground and way whereby the Lord passed into this glorious supremacy, and that we Christians see Him already crowned with glory and honour in consequence, though not yet do we see all things subjected to Him. Daniel 7: 13, 14 shows Him coming with the clouds of heaven in this same glory to the Ancient of days, and receiving dominion, glory, and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages, should serve Him — an everlasting dominion withal, which shall not pass away neither shall His kingdom be destroyed, as that of all others had been. In this glory, however, before He comes to judge the quick and the dead, Stephen beholds Him through the opened heavens at the right hand of God. No doubt this was a sight miraculously vouchsafed to the proto-martyr, but what he then witnessed on high is revealed for us also to know and profit by even now in the Spirit.

Saul of Tarsus brings us an immense step beyond, for He proclaims Jesus in His proper and divine glory as the Son of God; whilst it was reserved for John, the apostle, to give his most admirable record of the Lord in this self-same way and to show how the intrinsic glory of His person superseded every object hitherto precious in the eyes of Israel, a divine glory, which could not be hid though veiled in flesh, and which manifested itself on departing by sending down from heaven the other Paraclete, though (not less than Himself) a divine person, the Spirit of truth, not only to glorify Him, but that we might have fellowship with those who most of all enjoyed His presence here below; 'and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.'

It is well to notice that Saul thus preached Jesus 'immediately' and 'in the synagogues'. Hence we may see how powerfully, and the more so because indirectly, the account of Luke confirms his own explicit statement to the Galatians (Gal. 1: 12) that he did not receive the gospel he preached from man, nor was he taught it but by revelation of Jesus Christ. How strikingly too all this, so different from what learned and pious men say or think about it, falls in with the character of his preaching so distinct from all before him: the same Jesus, but His glory viewed neither as connected with Israel, nor as conferred because of His sufferings, but higher up and divinely personal!

That he was formed in his peculiar line by Ananias is more worthy of a Corinthian than of a Reformer, though natural in those who lay exaggerated and unscriptural stress on human elements for the training of Christ's servants. God is sovereign in this as elsewhere. The Lord had His own aims in calling Saul and Luke, as in calling the differing cases of Peter and James. He can call from learning and science whether to pour contempt on human pride in such fields or to use them as He pleases; He can call from the land or sea those who have never known the schools to prove Himself superior to that which the vain world inordinately values. But Saul preached 'immediately', and 'in the synagogues'. What a testimony to conscience that *he* should preach Jesus, and preach Him as the Son of God!

The reader will observe that for 'Christ' in the Authorized Version after the Text. Rec. of verse 20 is here substituted 'Jesus', as it stands in the best authorities, followed by the Revised Version and

by others founded on carefully collated authorities. It is not improbable that the later copies which introduced the error may have been swayed by ignorant considerations of a quasi-Christian sort, unless it were a mere slip of memory which crept in and got perpetuated among those who understood not the difficulties and wants of such Jews as were addressed. To preach to them 'the Christ' or Messiah as the Son of God would have served no adequate purpose and have met with little, if any, opposition. They would have all allowed it in terms, even if none really entered into its full import. But the momentous truth Saul affirmed was as to Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth: and that *He* is the Son of God. What could be graver to a Jew? To accept it as of God was to condemn the people, and especially the religious, and to find himself in the dust before the Crucified (now risen and on high) for Whom this divine title was claimed in the highest and most exclusive sense. It became the turning-point not for time only but for eternity.

The signal change in the preacher also told powerfully. 'All that heard were astonished and said, Is not this he that in Jerusalem made havoc of those that called on this name, and had come hither for this thing, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests?' Such a conversion, coupled with his actual zeal for the truth, could not but be most impressive as grace which had wrought intended it to be. 'But Saul kept growing more in power and confounding the Jews that dwelt in Damascus, proving that this is the Christ.' Here 'Jesus' would be quite out of place, and the Messiah is the truth meant; for advance in truth received and learnt from God does not cast a slight on a lower level which is equally of God.

But breadth of mind in taking into consideration an immense sweep of varied truth and harmonizing all in the Lord Jesus to God's glory is one of the marked traits of His most remarkable servant. The Messiahship of Jesus must ever be a capital matter in dealing with Jews. Higher glories there are, as we have seen, of surpassing interest and importance, and none ever rose higher, in principle at least, than Saul did from his first testimony as we are told. But the lowest point of view had for its urgent and indefatigable advocate the same devoted man who was the earliest to proclaim the highest. None of Christ's servants has ever shown equal largeness of heart. We may perhaps say of him, in a deeper as well as more heavenly sphere, what God says of king Solomon to whom He gave wisdom and understanding exceeding much, so that God distinguishes him by 'largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore' (1 Kings 4: 29). The question of a Christian woman's wearing her hair long, or her head duly covered, was to him connected with and answered by the vast scope of creation, the theatre of God's purpose in Christ, which put the man and woman in their true relative place, and brought in the very angels as spectators meant to act on the spirit of such as walk by faith, not by sight (1 Cor. 11: 3-16). But who, save Saul of Tarsus, to settle a detail in conduct apparently so small, would ever have thought of such a scope in application of God's order and ways to maintain His moral glory?

The waxing powerful of Saul does not mean that he overcame his adversaries in disputation, but that the Spirit so strengthened him by the deepening of his soul in the divine word, which no doubt did bear down more and more the puny arms of such as opposed themselves. Whatever might have been his vast natural ability, whatever his providential training under Gamaliel, it was in practical dealing with souls in the synagogues or individually that the new nature in the Spirit's power found its true field of unremitting exercise.

So sudden, surprising, and profound, a conversion as that of Saul (by nature, character, attainments, and position, the most zealous of Jewish adversaries), could not but make the deepest impression on all observers especially those of the circumcision. How confirmatory to the disciples at Damascus! How impressive in the synagogues to hear him proclaim Jesus as the Son of God! How

suiting to confound those who denied Jesus to be the Christ! God's grace displayed in it was such as to amaze all that heard. The very opposition of the restless enemy was for the moment paralysed.

'And when many days were fulfilled, the Jews consulted together to kill him; but their plot became known to Saul. And they were watching the gates also day and night that they might kill him; but the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket.

1 The Text. Rec. has παρετήρουν τε, but the best witnesses give παρατηροῦντο δὲ καί, and so the chief modern editors.

2 The oldest copies, with ancient Latin copies, have the strange reading 'his' disciples, which appears to be as easy a slip as out of keeping with the account.

'And when he arrived at Jerusalem, he essayed to join himself to the disciples, and all were afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took and brought him unto the apostles, and declared to them how he saw the Lord in the way and that He spoke to him, and how in Damascus he preached boldly in the name of Jesus' (vers. 23-27).

The Spirit of God appears to comprehend in the first verses the space of three years which the apostle spent in Arabia, a fact of great significance as following on his conversion and used powerfully in the Epistle to the Galatians (Gal. 1: 17) to prove how little man, even the twelve, had to do with it. His call was in no way from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father that raised Him from among the dead; even as the gospel he preached was not according to man, nor yet did he receive it from man, nor was he taught it but by revelation of Jesus Christ. It was expressly meant of God to be independent of Jerusalem and the twelve but derived (call, apostolate, and gospel he preached) immediately from the prime source of grace, truth, and authority, the risen Head and God Himself. Thus was secured what was all-important, not only for the Gentile saints then and indeed thenceforward for the due intelligence of Christianity, but for our special profit now so menaced at the end of the age with the revival of the early Judaizing which opposed the full gospel at the beginning, as well as the heavenly independent character of Paul's office and testimony.

Otherwise it seemed even more extraordinary for Saul than for Moses to go to Arabia. But as there was of old divine wisdom in the long shelter there given to the future leader of Israel, so the break with the flesh was complete in the briefer sojourn of the apostle of the Gentiles, where none on earth could imagine he was winning for himself a good degree either in the humanities or in divinity. Such was God's ordering manifestly and wholly distinct from man's ways. He took no counsel with flesh and blood. He went not up to Jerusalem to those that were apostles before him, as all else would have thought most proper if not absolutely requisite. It was designedly on God's part death to the Jewish system in its best shape and to all successional order that Saul should go to Arabia, and again return to Damascus, and then after three years should go up to Jerusalem, not to receive office at apostolic hands, but to make acquaintance with Peter there remaining but fifteen days, and seeing none other of the apostles save James the brother of the Lord. For his ministry was to be the true and fullest pattern of that which according to the will of God was to follow when the temporary Jerusalem order should pass away, and the Holy Spirit would bring out all the blessed and governing principles of a heavenly Christ for the church His one body on earth, as well as for His servants individually; a ministry of holy liberty, the expression of God's grace in the full communication of His truth, centring in the divine and glorified person of Christ, to the utter denial of man's will and of the world's pride.

But the world, as the Lord had previously warned His disciples, hates those identified with Christ as it had hated Himself, and according to His word would persecute them as it had Him. And so Saul now proves at the hand of his old co-religionists, ever the most bitter. The Jews were plotting to

make away with him. 'Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do because they have not known the Father nor Me' (John 16: 2, 3). How evidently and deeply true! Nor did any more strikingly and continually verify their truth than Saul of Tarsus. The sword of the Spirit was too incisive in his hands, no matter how great his love and lowliness, not to rouse the unquenchable resentment and deadly enmity of Satan. And when the Jews went so far as even to watch the gates of Damascus both night and day that they might dispatch him, the disciples, much as they appreciated his ardent love of Christ and zeal for man's blessing, took him by night and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket. Miracle there was none, but an escape ordinary enough, if not ignominious for those who would surround the great apostle with a perpetual halo. How little they know of the cross, of God, and of His ways!

This escape from murderous hands at Damascus he relates in the wonder-sketch of his devoted labours and sufferings which he recounts to the ease-loving Corinthians when set against the blessed apostle by the deceitful workers there fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ (2 Cor. 11: 23-28). How admirably suited only to shame those who took care to work and suffer the least possible, but to kindle into burning love the feeblest spark in the true servants of Christ from that day to this! At the close of the list of trials which he gives us as 'foolishness' in his confidence of glorying, if others gloried after the flesh, before he says a word of the man in Christ he knows — himself of course, but purposely so put — caught up even to the third heaven, he winds all up with this very incident, in a singularly isolated way, so as to bring into juxtaposition his being let down through a window in a basket by the wall with his being caught up into paradise for exceedingly great revelations (2 Cor. 11: 32 - 12: 4). Strange conjunction, but how instructive withal, the same man lowered from a window in a city wall, and caught up to heaven to hear unspeakable words! Who but Paul had even thought of thus glorying in the things that concerned his weakness? For, if he did mention his most singular honour as a living man, he took care to tell us how, to counteract all self-exaltation, there was given him thenceforth a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him.

It may be well to note that in 2 Cor. 11: 32, 33, there is the additional information that the hostility he encountered was not confined to the synagogue but shared by the ethnarch of the then king, no doubt to do the Jews a favour, as others in somewhat the like position did afterwards: 'In Damascus, the governor under Aretas the king was guarding the city of Damascus, wishing to take me, and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.' This is cited, not to confirm the truth of Luke's account as if the divinely inspired word could be inaccurate or as if it needed support for a believer, but to give a fresh instance of the moral purpose which reigns in all scripture, the true key to that peculiar method of God, which is as perfect for His own glory and the growth of His children, as it furnishes occasion to the unbelief of man who judges all in the self-confidence of his own intellectual powers, at the utmost very limited, great as they may be. Information, important as it is in its place, is one of the least objects in the word of God which lets the faithful into the communion of His mind and love.

But a new and very different lesson now opens in the city of solemnities where not long since great grace was upon all, and the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied exceedingly, and a great crowd of even the priests were obedient to the faith. For Saul, having arrived at Jerusalem, essayed to join himself to the disciples, and all were afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. How painful on the one hand for that vessel full of divine affections, that channel even then overflowing with a testimony of Christ beyond these doubting brethren whose grace was really so small as to question the largest measure that had ever crossed their eyes! But how helpful on the other hand for us and all saints who have to learn that no one is to be received on his own responsibility, but

on adequate testimony from others! A man unknown, or only known by circumstances somewhat dubious, must ordinarily have a wonderful opinion of himself, or be surprisingly blind to the duties of others, if he expect to be welcomed within the holy bounds of Christ on the good account he gives of himself. And God's children must be exceedingly rash or be indifferent to His glory who hold the door open without a commendatory letter, or (if this through circumstances failed) its equivalent in some satisfactory degree. He who cannot present something of the kind ought rather to praise the care for the Lord's glory in His own, even if it call for a little patience or delay on his part, and never was there a time when such vigilance was more due in the interests of Christ and the church than in its present state. Let the saints only bear in mind that here too as everywhere it is a question not of letter but of spirit. Proof of reality Christward is and ought to be all that is wanted, while indifference to Him, and yielding all to the mere profession of His name, when nothing is so cheap, is the most offensive and guilty looseness. Legality is not well, where all should be grace, but it is at least far less indecent than laxity. A letter of commendation too could be, as we should not forget, most readily forged by an unscrupulous person.

Even if saints be ignorant or prejudiced the Lord never fails and soon raises up an instrument to remove the difficulty. For Barnabas 'took him and brought him to the apostles,' (no more, we have seen, than Peter and James) 'and declared to them how he saw the Lord in the way, and that He spoke to him, and how at Damascus he preached boldly in the name of Jesus' (ver. 27).

That this course on the part of Barnabas was owing to previous acquaintance with Saul! that they two had studied together at Tarsus! where both knew nothing of the Lord Jesus, and that either, even if true, could be a ground to satisfy the disciples, is just a sample of human guesswork — not to say of false principle — which disgraces those who cultivate such a style in the interpretation of scripture. But Christendom's hunger after all that tends to exalt the first Adam, as it demands such pabulum, is sure to find the supply where truth is neither trusted nor valued as displayed in Christ to God's glory. Is not the real key furnished by the sacred historian in a subsequent glimpse at Barnabas in Acts 11: 23, 24? When he saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted accordingly; for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. Nor was it in Antioch only or first that grace wrought mightily in him; for in far earlier days than either he had been singled out for what God had produced in him, in contrast with Ananias and Sapphira who had agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord (Acts 4: 36, 37, Acts 5: 1, 2).

How much one gracious heart can effect, and how little it matters what the circumstances may be through which it seeks to please the Lord and help those that are tried! Yet how often, when such a character is formed and proved, a crisis arises too strong for all but the present guidance of the Lord above all that is of man, and grace in all its fullness must control graciousness quite breaking down! And so Barnabas proved at a later day. How little any then could have anticipated that Saul would be the one to reprove Peter as well as Barnabas (Gal. 2: 13) for the allowance of flesh or law to the jeopardy of the truth of the gospel! Yet so we know it was, and scripture has set it out in glowing and imperishable words to preserve us in our weakness from like error. How thankful should we be for the condescending mercy of our God Who would thus turn to our account the mistakes even of the most honoured, instead of hiding any or palliating all in the genuine spirit of party to the dishonour of the Lord and the irreparable injury of our own souls.

It may be well to note that this visit to Jerusalem (ver. 26 *et seq.*) is not to be regarded as immediately consequent, being named here in order to complete the history of Saul thus far by the account of his first introduction to the saints there.

Adequate testimony then to the call of divine grace is the true ground of reception: and the peculiar antecedents of Saul brought it out in high relief. There are very different circumstances now where the world in these lands calls itself Christian. But the principle abides, though profession in an easy-going estate where corruptions (moral, ecclesiastical, and doctrinal) abound is as far as possible from calling on the name of the Lord in the face of opposed nature and persecution private or public. It is of the deepest moment that all for each soul should turn on His name, the only passport which ought to be demanded as thus directly magnifying Him, the best of all safeguards against the world, the flesh, and the devil; for His name is the death-knell of all evil, whatever its varying form. To that Name the highest of earth must bow and be indebted for recognition when every tongue confesses Him Lord to the glory of God the Father but the same Name introduces the most down-trodden slave into the fullness of grace now with living hope of heavenly and everlasting glory. And though His name solemnly summons every one that names it to stand aloof from unrighteousness, against none here and at once does it threaten such scathing judgment as when men (no matter what their fame, credit, or pretensions) bring not the doctrine of Christ.

But the assembly, profoundly engaged to care for the common interests of that Name, looks for trustworthy testimony as to each soul that names it. This gives the fullest scope to faith and love in the saints already within who, seeking the glory of the Lord in those that confess Him, are, according to their measure, reliable witnesses, whether for receiving a Saul of Tarsus, or for rejecting a Simon Magus. For if all have communion as saints in what is done, and are free, yea bound, to satisfy themselves, the evidence on which they judge practically rests with such as, enjoying the confidence of all, have love enough to ascertain the truth. The church acts on witnesses it believes. So it is shown in the striking instance before us that we might be guided aright in our own duty, even where the outward features are as unlike as possible. But, the church being a divine institution and not a mere voluntary society even of saints, there is a holy and wise principle which governs (or at least it ought, and will if done rightly), bringing out the Lord's glory, as in Saul's case. Active love, animated by a single eye to Christ, will see clearly and judge aright.

'And he was with them going in and going out at¹ Jerusalem,² preaching boldly in the name of the Lord³, and he was speaking and discussing with the Hellenists⁴, but they had in hand to kill him. And when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him off unto Tarsus' (vers. 28-30).

1 εἰς ABCELP, *et al.*, ἐν H., Syrr. Pst. & Hcl., Arm. Æthiop.

2 ABC Fuld, Arm., *et al.*, omit the copulative: EHLP Vulg. Syrr. Cop., *et al.*, insert.

3 T.R. with p.m. HLP, *et al.*, add Ἰησοῦ, but p.m. ABE and Versions omit; Ἰησοῦ only, is read by C, Syr. Pst.

4 A is alone of the uncials in reading Ἕλληνας, all others giving Ἕλληνιστάς.

Liberty was thus enjoyed whether for fellowship or for testimony. It is indeed essential to Christianity and in contrast with the law which genders bondage. 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty'; or, as He Himself testified, 'I am the door, by Me if any one enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture.' Salvation, liberty, and food are assured by His grace: and so Saul was proving at this time even in Jerusalem. What could be sweeter than to taste it for his soul, where tradition had so lately blinded his eyes, and zeal for the law led him to persecute the way of divine grace unto death, binding and delivering into prison both men and women?

But there was more than this — bold utterance in the name of the Lord, which well becomes the

object of grace. If 'this day is a day of good tidings', and assuredly it is, beyond all that ever dawned, how hold our peace? Not so did the four leprous men, when famine pressed the city of Samaria, and they found the deserted camp of the Syrians full of every good thing for those that were otherwise perishing with hunger (2 Kings 7: 9). And who in Jerusalem more than Saul, its late emissary of bonds or death for all that called on the name of the Lord, could with godly assurance proclaim His name by faith in it to strengthen the weak and release the captives, to give life to the dead and liberty to the oppressed, or (as he said in a later day) to open their eyes, that they might turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, receiving remission of sins and inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith in Christ? For free and bold testimony in His name is the fruit of His grace, no less than liberty for one's own soul; and in this order too. We need to be set free from every hindrance and weight and doubt and question, we need the liberty wherewith Christ sets free, before the mouth can open boldly to make known His grace and glory to others. It is not to angels that God subjected the habitable earth to come but to Christ Who will give His saints to reign with Him. It is not to angels that He gives the gospel commission but to His servants who were once children of wrath even as others. How soon even Christians forgot His ways and returned to the yoke of bondage and to fleshly successional order, to the rudiments of the world which played their fatal part in crucifying the Lord, now to find themselves, if God be believed, set aside and condemned to death in His cross!

But Saul, as he lets us know, when called by grace to have God's Son revealed in him that he might preach Him among the Gentiles, immediately conferred not with flesh and blood, but went into Arabia and returned again to Damascus. Even when he did go up to Jerusalem, it was 'to see (or visit) Peter', not to take holy orders, any more than to go through a theological curriculum, for 'he abode with him fifteen days' seeing none other of the apostles save James the Lord's brother (Gal. 1: 15-19). And on this he speaks with impressive urgency, as a matter of the deepest moment for God's glory that the truth of his independent mission should be established for ever and beyond question, bound up as it is with the gospel revealed by him in a fullness and height beyond all others. In Jerusalem too we see his full liberty and his bold testimony to the Lord's name.

All was ordered that the truth of the gospel might continue with the Gentiles; but with the Jews also he maintains the same principle and conduct. Alas! it was ill appreciated. For on the one hand, the Gentiles have not continued in God's goodness but throughout Christendom have turned back, like a dog to its own vomit; judaizing so egregiously as to give people the impression that the gospel is a sort of half-improved, half-mitigated, law, instead of being the perfect expression of God's grace in justifying ungodly sinners by the faith of Christ in virtue of His death and resurrection. On the other hand, when Saul turned in the name of the Lord to the Hellenists, or Greek-speaking Jews, with the loving zeal of a hater of party, to impart the truth which had set himself free, seeking not theirs but them, they betrayed how little those are subject to God's law who despise and refuse His gospel, for they went about to kill him. They were but Abraham's seed, not his children (John 8: 33 44): if they had been his children, they would have done the works of Abraham. They had really the devil for their father, a murderer and a liar from the beginning; and his works they did.

It is needless to dwell on the error whether of old MS. or of ancient version, which makes the apostle speak and dispute at this early day with the 'Greeks' in Jerusalem. In fact it was with the same class which furnished 'the seven' who had been set over the daily ministrations; of whom Stephen and Philip had been so highly honoured also in the word (Acts 6: 1-5). Saul was drawn out the more toward them, as no longer a bigot, but one who sought out the Hellenists the more as he had been the prime energetic leader in the persecution that followed Stephen's death. Now he himself is exposed to their deadly hatred; 'and when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him

off to Tarsus.' It seems clear that this was not Caesarea Philippi, but rather the seat of the Roman governor, whence he readily went by sea. Nor is Gal. 1: 21 any real difficulty; for it only informs us that he then came to the regions of Syria and Cilicia, which was easy by ship; and the following verse intimates that he was still unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ.

'The assembly¹ then, throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria, had¹ peace, being edified¹; and walking¹ in the fear of the² Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit, was multiplied' (ver. 31).

1 The singular is read by ABC Vulg. Syr. Pst., Sah. Cop. Arm. Æthiop, Erp Arab., *et al.*, as against the plural of the Text. Rec. HLP Syr. Hcl (and E, ἐκκλησίαι πᾶσαι).

2 The article is omitted by A, though read by all others.

There seems no good ground to make this verse the concluding sentence of the paragraph, as the state of the church throughout these districts is not meant to be connected with Saul one way or another. It is rather, while attending to their past trial, an introduction to the account of Peter's visit which immediately succeeds, and it can thereon well stand by itself.

Having given us the peaceful and prosperous condition of the church throughout Palestine, the Spirit of God now turns to speak of Peter. He that wrought effectually in him, the great apostle of the circumcision, had just shown us the mighty vessel of His grace called to do work among the Gentiles. But Saul of Tarsus is dropped for the present, and we have the familiar figure of Peter brought before us, not in Jerusalem, nor yet in Samaria as once with John, but alone on a visitation of Judea. If there was peace for the church, there was no less power than at the first in him who was behind none since Pentecost.

'Now it came to pass that Peter going through all [parts] came down also to the saints inhabiting Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Æneas, for eight years lying on a couch, who was paralysed. And Peter said to him, Æneas, Jesus [the]³ Christ heareth thee: rise up and make thy couch. And immediately he rose up. And all that inhabited Lydda and the⁴ Sharon saw him, who also turned to the Lord' (vers. 32-35).

3 Bp.m. C with half a dozen cursives, *et al.* omit the article which is supported by the great mass of copies.

4 I presume the Revisers meant to distinguish between the town and the district by 'at Lydda and in Sharon'.

Grace thus used the apostle, not merely for the edification of the saints but for winning fresh souls to God. Lydda or Lod was at this time a considerable town — as Josephus informs us, not behind a city in size. And there God wrought a miracle, to arrest unbelievers, in the person of Æneas. It does not appear that he was a believer, being described as 'a certain man'. Indeed, as the rule, believers were not objects of miraculous power, however often they may have been its instruments. Timothy is exhorted by the apostle to use ordinary means: 'Be no longer a water-drinker, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.' Epaphroditus drew out in his sickness deep exercises in Paul's heart; and Trophimus, the apostle left at Miletus, sick, instead of healing him. The Lord has His special dealings with such: not even an apostle would interfere. But as tongues were for a sign to unbelievers, so, on such, power was free to act to God's glory, and the cure of the long-palsied Æneas became a striking testimony to all the dwellers around.

The manner of Peter's action and his words are remarkable: 'Æneas, Jesus [the] Christ heareth

thee: rise up and make thy couch.' And so it was straightway: power to help himself as well as to rise up. The power of God was exercised in this serious case of one palsied for eight years through the true but rejected Christ. Jehovah-Jesus was the healer of disease. It was but a testimony now. What He did on a small scale during this present evil age is only a sample of the world or age to come. Then He will prove Himself the Forgiver of all Israel's iniquities and the Healer of all their diseases, according to Psalm 103: 3, when His kingdom rules over all.

Meanwhile the word of God acts; the gospel is blessed, for 'all who inhabited Lydda and the Sharon saw him, who also turned to the Lord.' Their souls were impressed, so that they gave heed to the truth and turned to the Lord. It was a real work of the Spirit of God, and not simple astonishment at a miracle. But it had also the peculiarity of being very extensive and all-embracing. Whole communities were brought in. Nor was it only that they professed, or were baptised: of this the Holy Spirit says nothing. All in those parts saw the paralyzed man who was on the spot healed in the name of Jesus; and they turned to the Lord. Some who seem disposed to doubt the work of grace in 'households', and anxious to reduce it to a merely intellectual recognition of the Lord, if even so much as this, might profitably consider the great work done at Lydda, consequent on the healing of Æneas. The language here is wholly inconsistent with a sponsorial profession, it was a wide but real action of divine grace, the external sign, which no doubt followed as a conferred privilege, being not even named.

It may be added that K^hhn^l has as utterly failed in the grammar as in the exegesis, when he would have this last passage to mean merely that all the Christians (i.e., all those who had turned to the Lord) saw Æneas restored to health. For though the aorist may occasionally bear or require a pluperfect force in English, in the sentence before us such a rendering is not only uncalled for but destroys the power and dignity of the narrative; whereas the ordinary meaning in the simplest way maintains all that could be desired, crowning the miracle wrought, with a worthy and blessed spiritual result, instead of a close so frigid and feeble as to sink below not scripture only but any writing whatever. Grammatically too the indefinite relative is just the word proper to introduce the statement of a moral nature or character.

But it may interest some to know that Lydda in the New Testament is no other than the Lod of 1 Chr. 8: 12; Ezra 2: 33; Neh. 7: 37, Neh. 11: 35, called Ludd or Lidi to this day, scarcely so 'miserable a village' as Messrs. Webster and Wilkinson think, if we are to credit the popular report of Dr. Thomson, who represents it as a flourishing community of some two thousand persons, evidently thriving and industrious, 'embosomed in noble orchards of olive, fig, pomegranate, mulberry, sycamore and other trees, and surrounded every way by a very fertile neighbourhood.' Ono, Hadid, and Neballat, of old associated with Lod, have still their representatives distinctly enough under their modern disguise.

Further, though Calvin lays it down confidently that the Sharon (or Assaron,¹ as he calls it) was a city hard by, and slights Jerome's thought that thereby is meant the plain lying between Caesarea and Joppa, there is no good reason to doubt that the early translator is right, not the reformer. And the minute accuracy of the Greek text affords a striking evidence to the reader in the article prefixed to 'Sharon', not to Lydda. So invariably is it in the Hebrew, where the same district is referred to (1 Chr. 27: 29; Cant. 2: 1, Isa. 33: 9, Isa. 35: 2, Isa. 65: 10), whereas the article is dropped where the same name is applied to a different locality on the other side of Jordan and not improbably a town of the Gadites. 'The Sharon' lay north of another district, 'the Sephelah', which in our Version has fared worse than 'the Sharon' in having been quite stripped of its character as a proper name and reduced to 'the vale' and other vague terms.

1 So HLP and many cursives, manuscripts which probably point to the Hebrew article. Cf. Joshua 12: 18 (Lasharon). The Sinaitic indeed erroneously omits the article before the word, but it is added as a correction.

Here then it was that the energy of the Spirit was pleased to win glory to the Lord Jesus and to bless souls by Peter at the very time when sovereign grace was preparing another and yet more favoured servant of Christ, not only to proclaim the gospel in the whole creation, but to complete the word of God, the mystery that had been hid from ages and from generations. Yet another and greater exertion of divine power was soon to follow, and a more distinct testimony of grace to the Gentiles through Peter himself, as we shall see in the immediate sequel, and according to a wisdom that never failed. But one may not anticipate more at this time. Grace would ere long work more profoundly as well as indiscriminately; the heavenly side of the gospel must shine out more distinctly and suitably to Him Who sits the glorified Man, at the right hand of God. But it was from no lack of zealous testimony on Peter's part; nor was it that power from above failed in his ministry to put honour on the name of Jesus, or to shed blessing on the souls that believed. But all the divine counsels must be duly revealed as well as accomplished in their season; and God has His fitting ways no less than His counsels. And we do well to take heed to His word which reveals all this and more, that we may be completely furnished to every good work.

Another circumstance of like kind at a different place gave occasion for the power of God to display itself by Peter still more wonderfully.

'Now, in Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which, being interpreted is called Dorcas (Gazelle). She was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days that she fell sick and died: and, having washed, they laid her in an upper¹ room. And as Lydda was near to Joppa, the disciples hearing that Peter was there sent two men unto him, beseeching, Delay² not to come on to us. And Peter rose up and went with them, whom, on his arrival, they brought up into the upper room; and all the widows stood by him weeping and showing the coats and cloaks which Dorcas used to make while she was with them. But Peter, putting them all forth and kneeling down, prayed, and, turning unto the body, he said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. And, giving her a hand, he raised her up, and calling the saints and the widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout the whole of Joppa, and many believed on the Lord; and it came to pass that he remained many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner' (vers. 36-43).

1 Lachmann, following ACE (and many cursives), reads 'the', but the best and most ancient copies confirm the common reading with all other editors.

2 The ancient copies give the entreaty more graphically than the Text. Rec.

Will it be believed that a professed and not unlearned translator of the New Testament dared thus to render the opening verse: 'Moreover, there was among the disciples at Joppa a woman named Tabitha, who was always doing good works and giving alms'? I cite from Gilbert Wakefield's second edition ii. 27, though I cannot say (not having its predecessor) whether this is one of its alleged 'improvements' or a mere reproduction of the first. It is the note (on page 375) which is so offensive: — 'I have left out the impertinent explanation in this verse, because, even if no interpolation it must be either ridiculous or unintelligible in a translation.' It is the more shameless from one who allows himself no such audacity in his rendering (as among many like passages) of John 1: 38, 41, 42, with all three of which he deals fairly. Now what is the fact in our case? It is the true Aramaic form of that time and country; so Gamaliel's maid was called; and Josephus (B.J. iv. iii. 5) gives as Luke does the

same corresponding Greek name to the mother of a certain truculent John, as the English reader can see in Dr. Traill's Tr. ii. 64. The Hebrew word that answers to it means 'beauty'; but it is commonly used of a 'gazelle', 'hart', or 'roe', as in Deut.; 2 Sam.; Song of Solomon. So in our own tongue men and women are called Buck, Doe, Roe, Stag, and the like. In Lucret. iv. 1154 it occurs as a term of endearment. Where is the 'impertinence' of such an explanation? Only in the empty, presumptuous, and profane mind of Mr. Wakefield. I take the trouble of refuting it, as a caution to the misinformed not to be imposed on by the unconscious impiety of such as believe not the inspired character of Holy Writ. Whenever they assail that word, it would be easy to expose their self-sufficient folly.

Tabitha, or Dorcas, then, is described as a disciple at Joppa, who was a doer of the word and not a hearer only; for her pure and undefiled service before her God and Father was to remember the widows in their affliction, keeping herself unspotted from the world. She was as full of good works and alms-deeds as of faith. In those days then she sickened and died. Now if washed in the usual way, she was laid in an upper room, a suitable place to await the arrival of the apostle. For it seems not obscurely implied that the disciples looked for more than consolation in sending messengers for the apostle just at that moment and admitting of no delay;¹ as he on his part promptly met their entreaty. As usual the scene is livingly before us, though it is with Peter for the central figure, not Paul of whom Luke was the cherished companion. But what mattered this or that if the Spirit inspired him to give us the truth to Christ's praise? *He* certainly had it all before Him as it was, though Luke was not there: and no jealousy for his leader tarnished one word of Luke's narrative. There they were in the upper chamber, and all the widows stood by Peter, not in tears only but displaying the work of Dorcas' loving hands, the clothes inner and outer which she used to make while she was with them.

¹ The marginal reading (ver. 38) of the Authorized Version ('be *grieved*') is in no way suitable as a rendering here, though habitually used in classical authors for the hesitation of shame, pity, or alarm. They were led to retain it in the margin through their respect for Tyndale, followed by Cranmer. The Geneva V. discarded it rightly. The Rhemites give 'Be not loth', though Wiclif had translated correctly, as they adhered servilely to the Vulgate. Num. 22: 16; Judges. 18: 9 are unquestionable precedents in the LXX., and so Josephus, Ant. ii. 7.

But Peter had not come for condolence only or chiefly, but for the glory of God that Jesus the Son of God might be glorified in her who was gone. So, putting them all out and kneeling down, he prayed. He sought not to display the great work about to be done; he sought the Lord only, and with that grave reverence which became one who walked in presence of the Unseen Who alone could avail. Here again how vividly graphic is the recital! yet no eye of man was on Peter and the body of the disciple. He Who wrought in power through one servant has told us it through another. Some of old in east and west and south have ventured to add 'In the name of [our Lord] Jesus Christ'.² If they meant honour, they were guilty of a heinous wrong. 'Add thou not unto His words.' The inspiring Spirit has given us the truth perfectly. Enough to know that Peter knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, said, Tabitha, arise. Spoil not the word of God, O man, unworthy of the name of a believer, unworthy of the task of a translator, or of an expositor, by thy unhallowed glosses. His prayer proved to Whom He looked and on Whom He leaned; but we may not take from His words in Acts 3: 6, nor add to them in Acts 9: 40, nor assimilate either one or other to Acts 9: 34. Let us be assured that each is as God wrote it, and therefore as each should be: our place is to receive humbly, believe confidingly, and enjoy to the uttermost.

² So in the Thebaic, Armenian, Philox. Syriac; Cyprian, et al.

The power of the Lord was there, according to His servant's prayer, not to heal as before, but to

raise the dead. 'And she opened her eyes; and seeing Peter, sat up. And, giving her a hand, he raised her up; and calling the saints [who had the deepest and least interested feeling] and the widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout the whole of Joppa.'

Yet it is to be remarked that the moral or spiritual effect is not to be measured by the comparative character or measure of the power displayed. When the paralysed Æneas was healed, all who inhabited Lydda turned to the Lord, when the far greater wonder was wrought of raising up the deceased Dorcas in Joppa, no such wide or large effect followed, but 'many believed on the Lord'; a blessed result for these souls, and to His glory assuredly, but, as far as we may gather from scripture, by no means so comprehensive now as then. After all it is the word which is the true and right means of conversion to Him, whatever may be the means used to draw attention to His word. For His grace is sovereign, and refuses the plausible reasoning of men.

There is another word which the Spirit adds at the close, and not without its importance: 'And it came to pass that he remained many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.' The veil drops over the recollections of Dorcas if she had any about her recent experience, as in the case of Lazarus and all others raised from the dead. But of the great apostle of the circumcision, through whom pseudo-apostles claimed succession over the uncircumcision! as well as a monarch's patrimony, we are told that he stayed a good many days in Joppa at the house of a certain tanner who bore his own name of Simon. Has this no voice to those who easily believe that they too stand 'first' in the church of God in our day? No true apostle according to scripture ever possessed, ever sought, wealth or rank in virtue of his office. Alas! it is not only power that is departed, but, what is far more serious, the spirit of obedience and the simplicity of faith, which last invests the least thing on earth, that Christ gives or sanctions, with the halo of heaven.

But there is also consistency with Christ to be maintained; and Christ was crucified on earth no less than glorified in heaven. Is the portion we seek, cherish, and defend, in real harmony? It is here and now we are put to the test. Are we allowing the corruption of Christendom to sully our faith or degrade our practice? Do we value, look for, or accept present earthly honour as the fruit of gospel service, and of position in the church? If it be so, let us learn from God's word that this is not fellowship with Christ's sufferings, nor are we in this respect at least in the communion of His apostles. Are we doing well in God's sight if we take conformity to the world so quietly? Christ deserves a better return at our hands. How sad that fidelity to Christ and the cross in our walk of every day should be counted a 'peculiar view'! 'Already are ye filled, already ye became rich, ye reigned without us: yea, and I would that ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. For, I think, God set forth us the apostles last, as men doomed to death: for we are made a spectacle to the world and angels and men. We are fools for Christ but ye wise in Christ; we weak but ye strong, ye glorious but we without honour' (1 Cor. 4: 8-10).

Acts 10

The sovereign grace of God toward an men was about to have another and yet more conclusive formal seal. It was not enough that the scattered Hellenists were preaching the gospel in the free action of the Holy Spirit or that Philip in particular had evangelized Samaria. It was not enough that Saul of Tarsus had been called from his persecutions to bear Christ's name before the Gentiles no less but more than before the sons of Israel. The apostle of the circumcision must now openly act on the grand principle of Christianity which knows no distinction between Jew and Greek. As the cross proves them alike sinful and lost (Rom. 3: 22, 23), the gospel meets them alike where they are (Rom. 10: 12),

and proclaims the same One to be Lord of all and rich unto all that call upon Him. This was now to be publicly demonstrated by Peter's preaching to the Gentiles, and their entrance into the privileges of the gospel on precisely the same terms of gratuitous, unconditional, and everlasting salvation by the faith of Christ as to the Jews at and since Pentecost. Henceforth there is no distinction for *whosoever shall* call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved

The circumstances of a change so momentous bore the unequivocal marks of divine authority; though, long before, the Lord Himself had announced it (Luke 24: 47) to the unwilling and therefore unintelligent ears of his disciples, and Peter had in terms affirmed it (Acts 2: 39), however little he seems to have as yet apprehended the force of what he then uttered. Indeed we are here and now carefully shown how reluctantly he set his hand to the work of indiscriminate grace till God left excuses no longer possible. But He would have the activity of His grace tarry no longer for the dull sons of men: His message of love to the lost must run forth in power; and the great apostle of the circumcision must be the one formally to open the gates of the kingdom not to Jews only but to Gentiles also. The moment was come; the man with whom to begin appears.

'Now a certain man in Caesarea, Cornelius by name, a centurion of a cohort that was called Italian, pious and fearing God with all his house 1giving much alms to the people, and entreating God continually, saw in a vision manifestly about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in unto him and saying to him, Cornelius. But he, gazing on him and being affrighted, said, What is it, Lord? And he said to him, Thy prayers and thine alms have gone up for a memorial before God. And now send men unto Joppa, and fetch [one]2 Simon, who is surnamed Peter: he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea. And when the angel that spoke to him had departed, he called two of his domestics and a pious soldier of those in close attendance, and, having recounted all to them sent them to Joppa' (vers. 1-8).

1 τε 'both' is In Text. Rec. which LP support with most cursives, *et al.*, but the most ancient and best reject.

2 Authorities are divided, so that 'one' is here hardly certain.

The Spirit of God is thus careful to make known the godly life of Cornelius. He was already a converted man, though a Gentile. But he did not know salvation proclaimed in the gospel. Therefore was Peter to be sent for, as Peter himself afterwards explained (Acts 11: 13, 14): else he could only have hoped for his soul in the mercy of God. But now the gospel is to teach sinful man, without distinction; and it seemed good to the all-wise God to bless thereby such a one as this devout Roman, as He had already in the same grace paid honour to the crucified Saviour by converting as well as filling with peace the penitent robber who hung by His side. They were as different tributes to the grace which came by Him as could well be conceived; but each was seasonable, each to the glory of Jesus, each a display of what God can afford to do through redemption. The pious centurion was only entitled to know his sins remitted on God's message of grace through the blood of Jesus.

The evangelical school, ignorant of the new and peculiar privileges of the gospel, were wont to regard Cornelius as a self-righteous philanthropist, because they did not distinguish between conversion and the known forgiveness of sins or salvation. But this was their ignorance. Even Bede knew better, when he said, albeit in dubious phraseology, that he came through faith to works, but through works was established in faith. Had Bede said through the gospel, instead of 'through works,' it would have been more in accordance with the truth; but those who cite him approvingly seem not more intelligent than our venerable light of the dark ages. It was really God putting honour on the accomplished sacrifice of Christ; and now that the Jews nationally had rejected their Messiah calling

by the gospel Gentiles into equal privilege with believing Israelites.

But the known godly character of Cornelius was suited to silence the prejudices of the ancient people of God. He looked to God and served Him in faith before He knew present salvation. If it were too much to say as Calvin does that, before Peter came, he had a church in his house, we are told on the highest authority that he was devout and feared God with all his household: no idol, we may be sure, was tolerated there. Instead of the rapacity of a Roman abroad, with contempt unbounded for the Jew, Cornelius abounded in alms-giving to 'the people' in their low estate, and this in Caesarea where Gentiles predominated. Best of all he entreated God continually. To suppose all this in one destitute of life is absurd. Cornelius was born of God and walked accordingly, though he had not yet peace; and God was now about to meet the wants and longings of his soul by the full revelation of His grace in the gospel.

An angel of God he sees in a vision not of the night. It was broad daylight, in the afternoon; nor was he asleep, but inquiring learns that God, not unmindful of his prayers and alms,¹ bids him fetch Simon Peter from Joppa. As the great apostle of the uncircumcision wrote at the end to instruct the slow mind of the believing Hebrews, so the great apostle of the circumcision was to be employed at the beginning in evangelizing at God's command the Gentiles. Does this beautiful interlacing offend you? If so, it proves how little you have entered into the divine ways which cut off all room or excuse for human independence. Neither in Judea nor in Rome (*pace Eusebii*)² nor anywhere else was there to be, if God were obeyed, the unseemly suicidal sight of a Jewish church distinct from a Gentile church. The assembly was on God's part meant to be on earth, let there be ever so many assemblies, the saints composing but one assembly, of which in due time it could be said, even when Corinthians were splitting into divisions, 'all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas' (1 Cor. 3: 21, 22). Here, however, it was a question of getting the gospel, as necessarily this is the true order, though the church follows in its proper course: individual blessing must be known before collective privilege and responsibility.

¹ It is not without interest to note the difference of Scripture from the Apocrypha. For in Tobit 12: 12 the angel is made to bring the memorial of prayer before God. in the Acts the prayers and the alms rise up there without intervention, whether or not an angel brings the answer. Canon Humphrey has well reminded us of this.

² The reference is to Eusebius (A.D. 264 340), Bishop of Caesarea, who wrote *The History of the Christian Church*. He has been called the 'Father of Church History' — *Editor*.

On the other hand, while these messengers were approaching Joppa, about noon of the next day, Peter retired to pray and, growing hungry saw in a trance, into which he fell, a sheet of striking significance, which he soon learnt to apply.

'And on the morrow, when they were journeying and drawing near to the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray about the sixth hour, and he became hungry and desired to eat, and while they made ready, a trance came over him, and he beholdeth the heaven opened and a certain vessel descending² as a great sheet by four corners let down upon the earth in which were all the quadrupeds and reptiles of the earth and [the]³ birds of the sky. And there came a voice unto him, Arise, Peter, slay and eat. But Peter said, By no means, Lord; because never did I eat anything common and unclean. And a voice [came] again a second time unto him, What God cleansed deem not thou common. And this was done thrice; and straightway⁴ the vessel was taken up into heaven' (vers. 9-16).

² Text. Rec. (supported by LP and most cursives) adds 'upon him' — I suppose from Matt. 3: 16,

Mark 1: 10, Luke 3: 22, John 1: 32, 33, and, very strangely contrary to the best MSS., Versions, *et al.*

3 The article here is doubtful, though its insertion in Text. Rec. has ancient authority as well as numbers.

4 The best MSS., *et al.*, sustain 'straightway' as against the Text. Rec. which gives 'again'.

Peter had not departed from that condition of dependence on God which he had expressed on the occasion of choosing 'the seven' to their diaconal service in Jerusalem. 'It is not fit that we [the twelve] should forsake the word of God and serve tables. Look ye out therefore . . . but we will give ourselves closely to prayer and to the ministry of the word.' (Acts 6: 2-4). So he assuredly was doing now when a special mission was being assigned him by God. He had withdrawn to be alone before Him. It was no question of repairing to the temple as once, or even to an oratory. The housetop sufficed; but it is well, when forms vanish, if the Spirit abides and grows stronger as here. We cannot afford to be slack in that which God honours in the apostle. The needy should not grow weary in telling out their need to Him and in counting on Him to act worthily of His great Name.

Peter receives a threefold testimony of God's purifying the Gentiles by faith, instead of separating Israel by circumcision. The cross had changed all, and put no difference between believers, Jew or Gentile. The former had lost thereby their old superiority according to flesh; both were now open alike to incomparably better blessings in Christ by faith. It was no question now of the law or of becoming a proselyte, or even of laying hold of the skirt of a Jew. From the open heaven light streamed on the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus, and grace declared the uncleanness gone which Sinai had denounced for a while with rigour. For all was over with the first man under the law. The Saviour speaks from heaven where such a distinction as Jews or Gentiles has no place, and acts on the efficacy of that blood which has procured everlasting redemption for all believers equally, be they Jew or Greek, barbarian or Scythian, male or female, bond or free. A Jew hitherto could no more eat of an unclean animal than he could eat with a sinner of the Gentiles. But the sheet, which came down from heaven and was taken up there, taught Peter in due time the immense change which hinges on the cross, answers to the glory of Christ on high, and drew from him on a later day even in Jerusalem itself the gracious confession. 'We believe that we shall be saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus, even as they also': not merely the Gentiles as the Jews, but the Jews in like manner as the Gentiles.

How far the saints or even the apostles anticipated the grace of the gospel must be evident to the least attentive reader of the inspired narrative. Even up to this hour Peter had no thought of, and ventured to object in the vision to, what the voice commanded from heaven. So little was the special character of the gospel in its free grace indebted to the hearts or minds of its most blessed preachers; so incontrovertibly does the word of God prove that what concerns us incalculably above all else for time and eternity proceeded from God alone, feeling and acting for Christ in His own love and to His own glory, though for these very reasons to our best and surest blessing also.

Very careful is the Spirit of God to give us full details: so grave a change as the reception of Gentiles on the same footing as a Jew was not made or owned lightly.

'And as Peter was perplexed¹ in himself what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men that had been sent by Cornelius, having sought out the house of Simon, stood at the gate, and having called were inquiring whether Simon surnamed Peter lodged there. Now while Peter was pondering over the vision, the Spirit said to him, Behold, three men seek thee; but arise, go down, and journey with them, nothing doubting because I have sent them. And Peter went down unto the men and said Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause for which ye are here' And they said, Cornelius, a centurion, a man righteous, and fearing God, and attested by the whole nation of the

Jews, was divinely warned by a holy angel to send for thee unto his house and to hear words from thee. Having therefore called them in he lodged [them]. And on the morrow he arose and went off with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa went with him' (vers. 17-23).

1 Such is the true construction, not 'in himself' separated from the verb, as by G. Wakefield and Valckenaer (like the Codex Bezae).

Men were employed throughout after the angelic mission to Cornelius but God is apparent in every part to disarm prejudice, own righteousness, display grace, and put honour on the name of Jesus to the blessing of man and to His own glory, for all which weighty ends the law, of which Israel boasted, had proved altogether unavailing. The great apostle Peter was indebted under God to the Gentile's invitation to solve the problem of his vision. But the Spirit is the agent of all blessing, intelligence, and power in the believer; and so His place is made conspicuous here (vers. 19, 20). It must be a divine impulse, and not a mere deduction of reasoning: for us and all this is a lesson of inestimable value. At first no doubt, sensible signs and extraordinary power ushered in His presence and manifested the new truth of His action in man; but the reality abides, as He abides with us, for ever, though outward signs in divine wisdom are no longer vouchsafed. This draws greater importance than ever to scripture in these last days when unbelievers turn from it more and more to unprofitable and mischievous fables.

It was thus made plain, beyond doubt, that God it was, not man nor yet the church, nor even the apostles, who opened the door to the nations equally as to the Jews. So the gospel intrinsically wrought and proclaimed: but even the believer is dull to appreciate the full import of what he has really received, and is wholly dependent on God's word and Spirit to give him growth and progress. The hour was come for the formal and public owning of believing Gentiles in the enjoyment of full gospel privileges. And it was meet that he who was, beyond doubt, of the twelve should be the one employed, rather than he who, already called, was designated to be the apostle of the uncircumcision. Thus was the uniting bond of the Spirit best maintained in peace.

But it was of all moment that man's will should be excluded as well as man's wisdom. What could be more effectual to this end than the vision of Cornelius on the one hand and that of Peter on the other? The character of each gave special weight to what they saw and heard; and their concurrence, as attested by the 'three men' from Caesarea, as well as the 'six brethren' that accompanied Peter from Joppa, was of high value and unmistakable significance. Men were largely employed, as they were concerned in the deepest way, but so as to demonstrate to every upright mind that God was the moving spring in it all. The 'devout soldier' with two domestics has his lowly but valuable place and was soon to share the blessing, as well as the devout centurion on whom he waited closely; a blessing which is as distinctly characterized by the power of grace that brings down far higher than Cornelius, and lifts up far lower than the Roman soldier, uniting all believers even here below in one heavenly and indissoluble relationship to Christ.

The message delivered by the men from Caesarea was to the point. For a Roman officer in a garrison town to have the good report of the whole nation of the Jews was no small thing; but it was more for his own household to bear witness that he was a righteous man and God-fearing, as his soldier attendant evidently was also. And the prevalence of Jewish Sadduceanism did not lead to any toning down of the divine communication, which was calmly affirmed by men accustomed to frank uprightness. Cornelius, they said, 'was oracularly warned by a holy angel to fetch thee unto his house and hear words from thee.'

What a clear communication to Peter when his vision was followed up by the Spirit's application

of it! Nor can anything be plainer than the divine authority with which the Spirit speaks, and acts here as elsewhere — 'I have sent them': He is God.

How vividly too is set forth the value of 'words' in the gospel! Let the law demand 'works' of man to prove his powerlessness and that the offence may abound so as to overwhelm him with despair of himself and cast him only upon Christ. The gospel makes known in its 'words' the true God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent, and is thus the means of life eternal to every one that believes. The Jew might claim the law as imposed on His people in the stern solitude of Sinai, not so God's gospel concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, dead, risen, and glorified in heaven, which is now as open to the Gentile as to the Jew, but to neither save by the faith of Christ and His redemption.

Peter then set out with the rest from Joppa. 'And on the morrow he entered into Caesarea, and Cornelius was awaiting them, having called together his kinsmen and his near friends' (ver. 24).

Dear reader, have you nothing to learn from the zeal now, as well as the habitual piety and devotedness we saw before (vers. 2, 22), in the Roman centurion? Are we to be less zealously affected because we are more familiar with the wondrous grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ? Sorrowful fruit, not indeed of better light, but of fleshly indifference and worldly ease, which hinder the due activity of divine affections that others may live, as well as our own souls grow, by the knowledge of God.

'And when it came to pass that Peter entered, Cornelius met him and, falling at his feet, did homage, but Peter raised him, saying, Rise up, I myself also am a man' (vers. 25, 26). It was the more remarkable, as a Roman in general never offered the salaam of prostration to a stranger. But the lowly and pious mind of Cornelius was wrought to such a pitch of expectation by the angelic message that he failed to sever the preacher from the truth he was sent to make known, and was thus disposed to pay more than honour meet to him whom God had directed him to send for. On the other hand the dignity which accompanies the truth is not only compatible with the deepest humility but produces and increases it in proportion to the power which grace acquires over the soul. Impossible not to be humble, if we are consciously in God's presence; and this the gospel is calculated above all things to make good habitually, as it does in the measure of our faith and spirituality. Peter refused such mistaken homage at once.

Oh, you who claim to be Peter's peculiar and exclusive successor, are you not ashamed? Why are you of all men the most distant from his ways the most opposed to his spirit? Silver and gold you have, which he had not; but the faith he preached you deny and corrupt, and the lowliness he practised even to an unbaptized Gentile pronounces the most solemn rebuke on your pride, when you (installed as Pope) seat yourself 'on the very spot where the pyx containing the host usually stands',¹ and the cardinal princes of the empire repeatedly adore you, each prostrating himself before you and kissing the slippered toe as well as the covered hand. Can contrast be more complete? And this is 'succession'!

¹ So testifies an eye-witness, Mr. Thompson of Banchory.

'And conversing with him he entered and findeth many come together and he said to them, Yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to join himself or come unto one of another race. And me God showed to call no man common or unclean: wherefore also without gainsaying I came when sent for. I ask then on what account ye sent for me. And Cornelius said Pour days ago till this hour I was fasting and the ninth [hour] praying in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing and says Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms had in remembrance before God: send then unto Joppa, and call for Simon who is surnamed Peter He lodgeth in the house of Simon a tanner by [the] sea. Forthwith then I sent unto thee, and thou hast done well in arriving. Now then we are all

here before God to hear all the things that have been commanded thee of the Lord' (vers. 27-33).

Peter, after entering not only the house but the apartment where Cornelius had his company waiting to hear the gospel, explains first what they all knew, then what God had just shown to himself. For their part they were aware that for a Jew to be familiar with a Gentile was unlawful: he on his had it shown of God that he was not to call any man common or unclean. Now that the true light shines, the old distinction is gone. It was not so at the beginning; it is no longer in force. If God was entitled to institute such a difference, He was no less free to annul it; and so He had shown Peter in special preparation for Cornelius whom God had directed to send for Peter, who had come thereon 'without gainsaying', as became him. For what has faith to do in such circumstances but to obey? If Christ Himself was beyond all the Obedient Man, the apostles differed from others not more in their gift and power than in the measure of their obedience. And to this is every saint sanctified by the Spirit — to the obedience of Jesus Christ, as distinctly as to the sprinkling of His blood. Let us exhort one another to this, and so much the more as we see the day approaching.

Cornelius then in answer explains why he sent for Peter. It was not without divine authority. He had been four days also praying, if not fasting also (for the reading is seriously questioned); on that afternoon an angel in a man's guise told him that his prayer was heard, and that he was to call to him Peter, who had well done in coming, as they were all there to hear all the Lord's commands through him.

Hear it, you that desire to honour Peter truly, that you may be saved from the destructive superstitions of his false successors. Were there succession, surely the first in the line is peculiarly to be regarded. See how readily he comes, without a word to say against it, at Cornelius' request. Ah! it is not Peter who demanded or received worldly pomp and human honour; it is you who have lost the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, and are under the dominion of dark and evil traditions which make God's word of none effect, and play into the hands of the god of this age who has blinded the minds of the unbelieving that the light of the gospel of Christ's glory should not dawn on them. Listen to Peter, I beseech you, and learn, not merely your error in departure from the living God, but the precious truth which is able to save your souls.

It was a serious moment for the apostle of the circumcision, prepared though he was by God's dealings with himself and with Cornelius. But there could be no doubt of the Lord's will, and the first step in the new departure must be taken then and there by himself.

'And Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him. The word which He sent forth to the sons of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all¹) — ye know the matter that came to pass throughout the whole of Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached — Jesus of Nazareth, how that God anointed Him with [the] Holy Spirit and power; Who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, because God was with Him. And we [are]² witnesses of all things which he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem, Whom also¹ they slew, hanging [Him] on a tree. Him God raised on the third day and gave Him to be manifest, not to all the people, but to witnesses that were chosen before by God, to us which ate and drank with Him after He rose from [the] dead. And He charged us to preach to the people and testify that this is He that is ordained by God judge of living and dead. To Him all the prophets bear witness that every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins through His name' (vers. 34-43).

1 Perhaps 'of all things'. The two accusatives λόγον and ῥῆμα are dependent on the verb

οἴδατε, 'ye know', the second being in apposition with the first.

2 'Are' is wanting in the best copies, which read 'also' omitted in the Text. Rec. 'We' here is emphatic, contradistinguished from the 'ye', also emphatic, in ver. 37.

The coming and work of Christ have put all things in their true place. Only since then has God Himself been either manifested or vindicated, for during previous ages, since the flood or at least the law, God seemed the God of Jews only, and not of Gentiles also. Now it is made evident that He cares for Gentiles no less than Jews; but it never was evident in the fullness of the truth till the Son of God was come Who has given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true. Not till we know His Son Jesus Christ can we say, This is the true God and eternal life. Nor had anyone more difficulty to pierce through the cloud of Jewish prejudice than the instrument here employed, but God had cast the true light of the cross more fully on his soul; and now he could say, 'Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons' (even were they Hebrews of the Hebrews), 'but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him.' Of this Cornelius and perhaps others of his house were already to a certain extent a living but hidden example. The principle, however, was now to be extended immensely, and what had been comparatively hidden was to be avowed and made public through the gospel. The very piety of Cornelius kept him from appropriating to himself as a Gentile what he knew God had sent forth to Israel, till grace sent it to him also. Thus should the charge of the risen Lord, hitherto suspended as it were, be applied no longer partially but in all its wide extent: 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation.' The law had been proved and declared powerless, and pretension to keep it unto life became the plain proof that no life was there. Christ is all. 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that disbelieveth shall be condemned' (Mark 16: 16). Peter understood all this as he never did before. Legal mist was passing away from his eyes. But nothing was farther from the truth than that there could be among Gentiles any more than Jews one to fear God or work righteousness without real living faith. The Jewish feeling which denied to any nation save their own the possibility of this acceptableness with God, he declares to be unfounded. His mission on God's part to Cornelius was expressly to assert His indiscriminate grace, as well as to begin authoritatively by one whom God set in the first place in the assembly the sending of the gospel to every creature.

Cornelius and those with him already knew the word which God sent forth to the sons of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ. But Peter carefully adds that Jesus is Lord not of the Jews only but of all. That which was a thing spoken of throughout Judea, beginning from despised Galilee of the Gentiles, after the baptism which John preached (as we read in Mark 1: 14, 15, where the Lord Himself called men to repent and believe the gospel) is the only salvation for Jew, or for Gentile when afterwards called as he now began to be. Jesus of Nazareth is the object of faith, Whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and power.¹ He was come to Whom all pointed that had in figure been anointed of God. The love of God to sinful man was evident in Him, and that love effectual in deliverance; for He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, because God was with Him. He was the true Messiah, but both in Himself and in His work immeasurably more, and this came out into the brightest evidence on His rejection. Yet was there ample testimony to Him before that rejection; so that man was without excuse. 'And we are witnesses of all things that He did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem, Whom also they slew, hanging Him on a tree.'

¹ It is amazing how intelligent Christians can repeat the ignorance of the Fathers, repeated by Petavius (*Dogm. Theolog.*) and others, confounding the action of the Spirit in the incarnation of our Lord with the anointing and seal at His baptism. But the operations of the Holy Spirit are sadly mistaken by most.

Whatever appearances may say, the will and word of God stands for ever; and faith knows it. 'Him God raised on the third day and gave Him to be manifest, not to all the people but to witnesses that were chosen before by God, to us who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead.' The resurrection is the pivoting and clenching of the gospel. If unbelief hold out against its testimony, what is clearer than that man hates both the love and the truth of God, and will not be saved at any price? The same resurrection of Jesus separates those who believe according to the value of Christ's death before God, making in their measure witnesses of Christ men who bowed to the testimony of the fore-appointed witnesses. He Whom they slew on a tree ate and drank with His own after He arose from the dead: not that He needed the food, but they needed the testimony that He was alive from the dead, a truly risen Man, Who having loved His own that were in the world, loved them to the uttermost.

He it was Who charged His disciples to preach to the people and testify that this is He that is ordained of God Judge of living and dead. Such a testimony clearly goes beyond Israel to take in all mankind within its scope, as the resurrection demonstrated beyond controversy. For if the Son of God deigned to be born of woman, born under law, His rejection by Israel, His death on the cross, broke all links with that people and left Him free for the display of sovereign grace in righteousness now while He is in heaven, as surely as He is determinately appointed by God Judge of living and dead when He comes again in glory. What has the risen Man to do with one nation more than another? He is the divinely defined Judge of living and dead by-and-by, as He is now Saviour of all that believe be they who they may. Judgment and salvation are equally cleared by the gospel and concentrated in His person. The law made nothing perfect. The prophets, on the failure of all, bore their precious intermediate testimony, and Peter appeals to them. 'To Him bear all the prophets witness that through His name every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins.'

To be born again, as has often been remarked, is not a proper privilege of the gospel, as all the ritualistic sects of Christendom suppose: for the new birth was always true for souls that believed (before, within, and without, Israel) since sin was in the world. The O.T. saints were as truly begotten of God as any of the New. Remission of sins is the primary boon of the gospel, though of course the new birth attached by grace to the same persons, and the privileges of the gospel go far beyond that gracious beginning. Here all is confusion, especially in the Christian bodies which boast of antiquity. Nor were even the Reformers at all clear in this fundamental and necessary truth. Lutherans, Calvinists Anglicans and others made baptism to be the means of life! either to all the baptized or to the elect among them. According to God's word they are all wrong, and inexcusably so. For scripture never treats baptism as the sign even of life-giving, but of death with Christ to sin, and of sins washed away for such as are already quickened. Christian baptism is a blessed institution, as the initiatory sign of the peculiar though primary privilege of the gospel. Blinder than the Jews are they who pervert it into a quickening ordinance, denying too, as generally they do, that the life given in the Son is eternal life: so that sacerdotal pretension is as vain as the doctrine is false.

And so we find in this very context: 'While Peter was yet speaking these sayings, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those that were hearing the word. And the faithful of the circumcision, as many as came with Peter, were amazed, because upon the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speaking with tongues, and magnifying God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, which (οἰτινες) received the Holy Spirit even as we? And he directed them to be baptized in the name of I Jesus Christ. Then they entreated him to abide certain days' (vers. 11 48).

1 The older MSS. and Versions omit 'the Lord'; some give 'the Lord', only; a few supply both.

It is striking to notice the various ways of divine wisdom. At Pentecost the believing Jews had to be baptized before they received the gift of the Spirit. They must solemnly take the place of death with Christ to all they had previously trusted. And even to this day the Jews feel its force; for when one of them is baptized to Christ Jesus, he is viewed and treated as dead to them and their religion. And so do the Brahmins, Mohammedans, or any who are not indifferent to their own profession. But the believing Gentiles as we see received the Holy Spirit while hearing the word, as most — perhaps all of us — have done; and baptism follows. Who could refuse the outward sign to the manifest recipients of that divine seal? Their gifts in speaking with tongues and magnifying God proclaimed the more precious and the ever-abiding gift of the Spirit. His seal is the true ground why those having it should be owned as members of Christ's body: not ecclesiastical intelligence in them; still less the will or the consent of other men. Our business is to honour God and to obey, not to legislate. If ways unworthy of Christ be done and persisted in, there is the remedy of scriptural discipline.

Here, whatever his old prejudices might have been, even Peter bowed. And they were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, it would seem, not by Peter, but at his direction by one or more of the brethren who accompanied him (ver. 48). There was neither vanity nor superstition in getting it done by Peter, though he took care in obedience to the Lord that it was duly done. It was of moment that they of the circumcision should go thoroughly with the mighty work of God's grace in sealing Gentile no less than Jew that believed. It was not too soon to be of moment that all may know that a simple brother may lawfully baptize even in a great apostle's presence, and that the act derived no value from office or gift. Only the evangelist should see that it be done after an orderly sort. No room was left for circumcision or the law. All is of grace reigning through righteousness. But a disciple is not on the external ground of a Christian till he is baptized. It is a privilege conferred on him who confesses Christ, and a sign of salvation through His death and resurrection.

Acts 11

Never had there been so important a step taken by man on the earth; never one demanding faith so urgently and evidently as now. Hence, though the assembly was then in its pristine order and beauty with the twelve acting together, notwithstanding the dispersion after Stephen's death which had scattered the saints generally, the Lord acted by a single servant of His whose own Jewish prejudices were notoriously of the strongest. The assembly is responsible to act together in all ordinary questions of godliness and discipline; it is bound to guard practically the foundations of truth and righteousness according to the written word. But a new departure needed and found a suited instrument, chosen and filled of God to initiate His will, and to take the step in advance, assuredly gathering it to be the will of the Lord.

Peter's faith was severely tried. For the first time since Pentecost he had to encounter doubts on the part of those who stood first in the church, and the fierce opposition of such as knew least of God and His ways. It was now not mere fleshly feeling of the Hellenists against the Hebrews, but the very serious question whether the foremost of the twelve had not compromised the testimony of Christ by the formal reception of Gentiles at Caesarea.

'But the apostles and the brethren which were in Judea heard that the Gentiles also received the word of God. And when Peter went up unto Jerusalem, they of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in unto men uncircumcized, and didst eat with them. But Peter began and set forth to them in order, saying, I was in the city of Joppa, praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descending like a great sheet, let down by four corners out of heaven, and it came as far

as me. On which having fixed mine eyes, I considered and saw the quadrupeds of the earth and the wild beasts and the reptiles and the birds of the heaven. And I heard also a voice saying to me, Arise, Peter, slay and eat. But I said, In no wise, Lord, because common or unclean never entered into my mouth. But a voice answered a second time out of heaven, What God cleansed make not thou common. And this was done thrice, and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold, immediately three men stood at the house in which I was, sent from Caesarea unto me; and the Spirit bade me go with them, doubting nothing. And there went with me also these six brethren, and we entered into the house of the man; and he reported to us how he saw the angel in his house, standing and saying Send to Joppa, and fetch Simon that is surnamed Peter, who shall speak words unto thee, whereby thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house. And on my beginning to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them as upon us also at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord how He said, John baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with [the] Holy Spirit. If then God gave to them the same gift as also to us when we¹ believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could forbid God? And when they heard these things, they were still, and glorified God, saying, Then indeed also to the Gentiles did God give repentance unto life' (vers. 1-18).

1 Alford takes πιστεύσασι as belonging to both 'them' and 'us', and expressive of the communion of the faith in the two parties, but though both of course did alike believe, this is to misconceive the reasoning which turns on the plain evidence of the Spirit given 'on our believing'.

It was undeniable on the face of things that Peter had openly traversed the distinction so long set up by God between Jew and Gentile. This he had to justify by God's authority; and so he does by the simple recital of the vision already before us in the preceding chapter, which he repeats for the conviction of the brethren in Jerusalem. The moment was come for the seeds which the Lord Jesus Himself had sown to germinate and bear fruit visibly. Had He, Who in Matt. 10: 5, forbade the twelve to go to any way of the Gentiles not also when risen told them expressly to go and make disciples of all the Gentiles? The vision of Peter was merely the reduction to practice of this great commission, or at least a kindred one. For in Luke 24: 47 the Lord about to ascend had declared that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name unto all the Gentiles, beginning from Jerusalem. And so it was. With Jerusalem they had begun. But now the tide was turning. From Jerusalem the saints had been scattered abroad. Samaria had already received the word of God, not by the church agreeing to it, nor even by the action of the apostles. And now God had left nothing ambiguous as to His will about the Gentiles. The gospel henceforth must go out indiscriminately. The holiness of Israel had come to naught in the cross of Christ. By virtue of the blood of the cross God could and would wash even the Gentiles clean. Ritual had come to its end. Henceforth there must be reality by faith. And as the cross of Christ pronounced all alike ruined, so now salvation was going forth to any that believed, Jew or Gentile alike. Such was the purport of the vision; and grace reasoned with Peter when he in the ecstasy ventured to controvert the Lord Himself. Who then so proper as he to convince the obstinate men of the circumcision? If they were contending with him, could he not tell them truly that he had himself dared to contend even with the Lord, Who had repeatedly and emphatically reproved his prejudices and had forbidden him to deem common what God had cleansed?

Peter told them also how the three men from the Gentile Cornelius appeared in person at that very moment before the house in Joppa, and how the Spirit bade him go with them without a question. Such a threefold cord could not be broken, each part was independent of the other, and all of them from God. For Cornelius in Caesarea had a vision no less than Peter in Joppa. But Peter had in addition, while he thought on the vision the Spirit directing him to go with the messengers of Cornelius before he knew that the three men were making inquiry at the gate.

Nay, there was more than this. God had manifestly used His word as only He could: 'As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell upon them, as also upon us at the beginning.' It was the gospel of their salvation. To them also the Spirit was supplied, Who wrought powers among them beyond possibility of cavil or question. The promise of the Father was therefore fulfilled in the Gentiles, as much as in the Jews who believed, according to the word of the Lord in Acts 1: 4, 5.

Again, let us remark how clearly this discourse of Peter distinguishes new birth from salvation.¹ Cornelius was assuredly born of God before Peter visited him at Caesarea. Nevertheless Peter was to speak unto him words whereby he should be *saved*. It is a gross mistake to suppose that the salvation which he now found is not far beyond new birth. Present salvation is the first foundation privilege of the gospel. To be born again was always true from Abel downwards. But those who are merely born again do not enter Christian ground until they have received at least the first and most needful blessing, to which the accomplishment of Christ's work entitles all who believe.

¹ Another remark must be made here, though it is grievous that it should be needed. When Cornelius was assured that he was to be saved by hearing the words spoken by Peter, how groundless and evil to infer that 'all his house' were to be saved *irrespective of faith!* Such heterodoxy is the result of the hot furnace and continual hammering on the anvil, of party. The terms of salvation are alike for Jew or Gentile, of grace but by faith. Here it is the more momentous because it is no question of baptism (as in Acts 16) but of salvation: only the sounder view of Acts 11 goes far to disprove theories built on Acts 16. But one error leads to another; and those who divorce the outward sign from the individual place assigned it in scripture, however blessed the number of individuals in a family, are in danger of advancing to a degree of error which would appal even the old and moderate holders of the prevalent tradition in the world-church whence this judaizing notion originated. Nobody is entitled to assume that *one* in all Cornelius' house was contemplated for salvation, *till* he too heard the gospel of salvation, unless salvation be by an ordinance.

The remarkable care with which God introduced the new standing-point [of salvation] to the Gentiles makes this confusion inexcusable. Now, while faith never was without suited mercy from God, it is one of the most marked signs of unbelief to ignore the peculiar privilege which God is now giving, and to go back to that mode or means which may have been at a former time. Here, as has been already and often pointed out, the Evangelicals are as dark as the Sacramentarians. For, if the latter party attach exorbitant efficacy to the mere sign of the blessing, the former are as ignorant of what is signified. Both agree in making the initiatory institution of the gospel to be the sign of life or the new birth; whereas it is really of the remission or washing away of sins (Acts 2: 38; Acts 22: 16), and of death with Christ (Rom. 6: 2, 3; Col. 2: 12), i.e., of salvation (1 Peter 3: 21). Cornelius learnt from the apostle that for a Gentile it was no question any longer of God's uncovenanted mercy. He himself, already born of God and acquainted with the Messiah come for the deliverance of His ancient people by faith, had now to learn of salvation's door open to the Gentile believer as truly as to the Jewish. It is not promise, as hitherto even to an Israelite, it is the work accomplished, and soul-salvation henceforth given to all believers without distinction. As the seal of it, the Holy Ghost was manifestly imparted as on the day of Pentecost.

This was conclusive for the objections of the circumcision then. Who was Peter, as he triumphantly closed his argument, who they, to resist God? None but He could give that gift, which He had granted alike to Jews and Gentiles by faith of the gospel.

But the principle is of immense importance permanently, and as much now as ever. The true ground of reception is not the acceptance of certain articles of faith, expressed or understood; still less

is it a certain measure of intelligence about the one body and one Spirit, which it is improbable that a single soul in Jerusalem then possessed definitely. It is a far weightier fact, the possession of 'the like gift'. If not so baptized of the Holy Spirit one is not really a member of Christ's body. To be born again never did suffice. One must have, through faith of Christ as the gospel proclaims Him and His work, the Spirit given to one as a believer. Without known remission of sins one may be quickened, but there cannot be what scripture calls 'salvation', any more than the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba, Father. There may be conversion, a divinely-given hatred of evil and love of good, God's word prized, and prayer; there may be conscience toward God, yet a real but imperfect looking to Christ. But till one knows by faith of the gospel, that all is clear between the soul and God through the sacrifice of Christ, the Holy Spirit does not seal the person, when there is submission to the righteousness of God, He does: then the believer is actually made a member of the one body of Christ. Of course such a one is, or ought to be, baptized with water, but in scripture this is never connected with that corporate and everlasting relationship. It is individual and bound up with the simple confession of Christ; so much so, that whatever God may do in sovereign grace, no intelligent saint would think of presenting a soul for fellowship of the church, unless he had previously taken the ground of a baptized person. But baptism of the Holy Ghost is wholly distinct from water baptism; and *this* is not even a sign of *that*, but of salvation by Christ or burial unto His death.

Even the stoutest defenders of Jewish exclusiveness were overwhelmed by the accumulated and crowning proof that God gave to the Gentiles also repentance unto life. It was now an incontestable and blessed fact. They were more than silenced, they 'were still'. Grace had triumphed, as it ought to do, over law, in Jerusalem, and among none but Jews that believed. It was not yet a day of ruin, when the least right are apt to tee the most self-confident and jubilant. It was grace made them glorify God in reversing their previous judgment.

But God works variously to accomplish His purpose, and so we see at this point of the inspired history. The action of Peter was of the utmost moment, and its acceptance in Jerusalem by those whom God had set in the highest place in the assembly. A fresh apostle had been expressly chosen outside the twelve, called by the glorified Christ in heaven where all for man is and must be of sovereign grace, given to be apostle of Gentiles in formal and acknowledged contradistinction from those of the circumcision. Nor was this all. The free action of the Holy Spirit receives a full and rich expression in the labours of brethren, who, when driven by persecution from Jerusalem, began to preach, but were bold enough to preach, without trance or vision or personal direction, outside the ancient people of God and even proselytes.

'They therefore that were scattered abroad through the tribulation that took place on the occasion of Stephen passed through as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none but Jews only. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming' unto Antioch spoke unto the Greeks¹ also, ¹ preaching the Lord Jesus. And [the] Lord's hand was with them and a great number believed and turned² unto the Lord. And the report concerning them came unto the ears of the assembly that was in Jerusalem; and they dispatched Barnabas³ as far as Antioch: who, on arriving and seeing the grace of God, rejoiced and exhorted all with purpose of heart to abide by the Lord. For he was a good man and full of [the] Holy Spirit and faith; and a large crowd was added to the Lord. And he³ went forth unto Tarsus to seek for Saul, and on finding brought him' unto Antioch. And it came to pass that even⁴ for a whole year they were gathered together in the assembly and taught a large crowd, and that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch' (vers. 19-26).

1 The simple participle is right, not the compounded as in Text. Rec. which drops 'also' and reads 'Ἑλληνιστᾶς after BDCorr. EHL P and most, the Sinaitic giving the strange blunder of

'evangelists' as its primary reading.

2 AB and three cursives give 'that believed turned'.

3 High authorities omit 'to go through', and 'Barnabas' in ver. 25, also the word 'him'. (one or both) in ver. 26.

4 'Even' is omitted in Text. Rec.

It will be observed that the account of this early and free evangelizing, first to Jews, but after a little while to Greeks, is reserved for the introduction of Saul's first connection with Antioch, the earthly starting-point of the great apostle's labours. This is quite in Luke's manner. His order (and none more orderly) is not one of simple sequence, such as we may see in the Gospel of Mark, still less does it linger on giving evidences of the change of dispensation, as in that of Matthew. He was led to deal with moral associations, which, if less patent, present a deeper arrangement, and fuller of instruction in God's ways, than a mere chronological series.

Whatever the value (and it was immense) of the episode we have lately had before us in Acts 9: 32 - 11: 18 (Acts 9: 31 being a sort of transitional link that closes what goes before and introduces it), God took care that the gospel should reach the Gentiles first in a way altogether informal, even while the highest ecclesiastical authorities were there to commence and sanction its inauguration with the seal of the whole apostolic college in Jerusalem. It pleased the Lord that all should be ordered otherwise; and the work among the Gentiles began with not even distinct purpose nor definite intelligence on the part of its promoters, with nothing apparent save the loving zeal that knew the desperate need of the Gentiles as well as the immeasurable efficacy of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. It was therefore according to the deepest wisdom as well as divine goodness that the real beginning of the gospel outside Israel should be simply of love flowing out from God only, as far as understanding went, in the circumstances that ensued on Stephen's martyrdom. Then, as we know, the saints generally were scattered through the persecution that set in. In the course of their passage here and there, Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch profited by their testimony. At first, however, the word was spoken to none but Jews only. Some of them, however, and these foreign Jews, Cyprians and Cyrenians, ventured farther, and in the last of the places named, at Antioch addressed the Greeks also with the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus.

Was not this very bold? Certainly it was of God Who made use of the providential circumstances for His glory. It was love, it was spiritual instinct, in the heart of those who evangelized, whose very names are unknown. God has taken particular care not to name them perhaps lest we should attribute to them a deeper perception of His mind than was really due. The momentous fact was there, and simple-hearted labourers were those to whom God gave this mighty and profound impulse by His Spirit. Let us admire these ways of God, which are higher than those even of His people, as the heavens are higher than the earth.

Man, even the wisest of His servants, would have expected otherwise. But the same God was now at work, Who, if He brought Moses by providence into the house of Pharaoh's daughter, brought him out of it by faith, Who even then did not use him, learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, to the deliverance of His people, till he had unlearned man as well as himself, and realized alone what God is, in the wilderness for forty long years: then and then only was he fitted of God to be a ruler and a deliverer. So now did it to God seem meet to begin Gentile Christianity through men of comparatively small account in either the world or the church, before there was the smallest intercourse between Peter and Cornelius. The highest order that ever was established in the assembly on earth could not therefore boast. The Lord is above that or any other grade; to Him none can dictate.

Nor has He abdicated His rights over the earth into the hands of a vicegerent any more than of the twelve. This having been vindicated by His sovereign employment of the Cyprians and Cyrenians who first planted the gospel among the nations, He does take care to send Peter to Caesarea and to have Peter's action on according to His direct command formally sanctioned by the twelve in Jerusalem. His own call of Saul to be apostle of the Gentiles was independent of both the free action at Antioch and the formal recognition of Caesarea at Jerusalem; as it was evidently also prior in time, and in many respects superior in claim and power, one may add to both, though this was not yet fully disclosed.

Of such weight it was in God's eyes to found, confirm, and authenticate this work among the Gentiles, so supremely interesting and indispensable to us, who without it were mere sinners, 'without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.' But if to us of such moment, what was it to the glory of His own grace? What to the praise of His Son, the Lord Jesus?

And if these brethren of Cyprus and Cyrene kept speaking to the Greeks also, announcing the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus, the Lord's hand was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. If ever men dared to draw indefinitely on grace without waiting for outward sign or open commission, if any servants of the Lord ever exposed themselves to a seemingly just taunt of going beyond all bounds, more especially as 'the twelve' were not only alive but together not so far off, surely it was these pioneers of grace to the Greeks.

Antioch in Syria was no doubt a suitable place in God's mind. The city was founded in 300 B.C. by Seleucus Nicator; and there, as the Jews possessed equal privileges with the Greeks politically, great numbers lived under the government of an ethnarch of their own. God never forgets kindness shown to His poor people even in their fallen estate, and knows how to repay with an interest unmistakably divine. Here first the Greeks heard, believed, and turned to the Lord.

It is well known that large and good MS. authority supports the reading of the common text, Hellenists, Grecians, or Greek-speaking Jews. But the sense afforded by corr. A Dpm, and, if not all the ancient versions, by the Armenian, is made decisive by the requirements of the truth stated. For in Jerusalem itself before the scattering not only were 'Grecians' objects of testimony as well as other Jews, but notoriously the murmuring was of that portion against the Hebrews, or native Jews who spoke Aramaic. Nay more, all 'the seven' chosen to allay the unworthy outbreak, and to relieve the apostles from a work that hindered for an incomparably better, bore Hellenistic names, and one of them was expressly from Antioch. Again, it is recorded in Acts 9: 29 how Saul of Tarsus spoke and disputed against these Hellenists in Jerusalem. Thus there would be nothing new or peculiar in similar speech at Antioch; whereas it is declared here that at first none but Jews were addressed, and afterwards 'the Greeks also', and this effectively under the good hand of the Lord. Now 'Hebrew' stands over against 'Hellenist', but not 'Jew', which includes both. So that 'Jew' can only be confronted by 'Greek', not by 'Hellenists', which falls under that category. The point therefore is so far from immaterial, that 'Greeks' can alone bear rigid or intelligent investigation, and at once conveys a new and important fact. Further, we must on no account suppose their conversion to the Lord by the gospel to have taken place after the disciples had heard of the call of Cornelius. It has been already stated that it occurred before Peter's visit to Caesarea. Evidently all that our chapter implies is, that the report about their conversion only then came to the ears of the assembly that was in Jerusalem. The fact of the conversion itself had of course taken place considerably before; and we have seen how beautifully its priority contributes its quota to the full scheme of God's grace, which called apostolic authority into action no less appropriately.

1 No wonder that with his usual tact Abp. Ussher (*Works*, xi. 24) accepted the reading, even though the Vatican supports that which prevails among the more modern copies, and the Fathers seem to vacillate with their too frequent lack of discernment. The effort of Wetstein, *et al.*, fails to make out that Ἑλληνισταί means Gentiles, instead of Greek-speaking or foreign Jews, its real import. Equally vain (as founded on the common mix-reading), is the reasoning of Saumaise, Wolf, *et al.*, that they were Gentiles but proselytes of Judaism. It may be well to note that while in the New Testament the Authorized Version distinguishes 'Grecian' (= Hellenist) from 'Greek', in the Old Testament (Joel 3: 6) the former is used for the latter where the LXX. properly have τῶν Ἑλλήνων. K^{1/4}hno1 is quite mistaken in referring ἐξ αὐτῶν (ver. 20) not to the scattered preachers but to the Jews just named.

Barnabas then, who was of Cyprus, though a Levite, comes to Antioch on his mission of inquiry. Nor can we conceive one more admirably chosen, if a genial heart devoted to Christ were wanted to judge fairly of the work in Antioch and to reassure those in Jerusalem adequately. For he, when he came and saw the grace of God, 'rejoiced and exhorted all with purpose of heart to abide by the Lord' (ver. 23). And striking is the comment of the inspired historian, who in no way grudges his true meed any more than Paul would because Barnabas subsequently was betrayed into unbecoming heat for his kinsman's sake: 'For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and faith.' Grace sealed his visit also, 'and a large crowd was added to the Lord.' Can we doubt that the work had still its mixed character, with Barnabas a fellow-workman in what drew out his joy?

Again, there is another trait very characteristic of this 'good man', and not only so but of the real working of the Holy Spirit, both in sending him to Antioch and now in his going off to Cilicia. 'And he went forth unto Tarsus to seek for Saul; and on finding [him] brought him unto Antioch' (vers. 25-26). Is it thus that we feel and act in presence of a large field of service where we are honoured by the Master's use? Do we in the midst of it remind ourselves of another who might be yet more efficient? Or does jealousy still hinder — still play its dark and deadly part to the dishonour of Christ and the loss of souls within and without? It was not so with Barnabas, who had already done a brother's office when all were alas! afraid of Saul (Acts 9: 26, 27). Now having learnt his value as a bold preacher when going in and out of Jerusalem, he bethinks him of the help Saul might render at Antioch, and, acting on it, he is enabled to execute his desire. 'And it came to pass that even for a whole year they were gathered together in¹ the assembly, and taught a large crowd, and that the disciples were first called² Christians in Antioch' (ver. 26). It was Christ's flock, not that of either; and His love animated them both, as others also no doubt, to care for it. In those days not one said that the assembly was his own, but served in it the more lovingly and holily because they always remembered that it is God's, and not man's.

1 'In' seems not more literal than exact and full. 'With' does not convey the intimacy of their relation, themselves a part of the assembly: it might rather imply a place less close. It will be noticed that here first do we read of 'the assembly', or church, in a Gentile city, whence in due time the Spirit sends Barnabas and Saul separated for their work of grace among the nations. Yet God so ordered that Antioch could not, more than Rome, boast of an apostolically founded assembly for, in the simple way we have seen, it began by men who in love preached to all alike the good news of Christ.

2 It is rather bold of Mr. Myers (*Norrisian Prize Essay*, 1832, p. 16, note) to say as an ascertained fact that 'the apostles gave the heathen converts this name'. The form of the Greek verb is active, no doubt; but what of its real force? The N.T. usage in the sense here required is limited to the occurrence of the future in Rom. 7: 3, which is beyond controversy opposed directly to the assumption. There it means 'shall be called' or 'get the name of' and so it is here. How much more sober is Abp. Ussher on the fact: 'Quod nomen, Latina non Graeca a Christo deflexum, a Romanis

Antiochiaie tum agentibus impositum illis fuisse videatur'. Where a divine communication is intended, the form is different. The classic use for managing, and hence speaking of, business, does not occur in the New Testament, though one can see how from this people would get a name, and at length a name irrespective of their business.

It is not without interest that the Spirit of God here adds that Antioch, notoriously famous of old for witty or scurrilous nicknames, first gave the designation of 'Christians' to the disciples, who within were styled 'faithful', 'brethren', 'saints', and otherwise 'Christians' was a name which Gentiles gave in reproach, as Jews called them 'Nazarenes', and Julian the apostate at a later day, 'Galileans'. Jews would never think of 'Christ' as the ground of a contemptuous term: what they scorned was that *Jesus* is the Christ.

'Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem unto Antioch; and there stood up one from among them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that a great famine was about to be over all the habitable [earth]; which came to pass under Claudius.² And according as any one of the disciples had means, they determined each of them to send help [*lit.*, for service] to the brethren that dwelt in Judea: which also they did dispatching [it] unto the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul' (vers. 27-30).

2 'Caesar' is added in Text. Rec.

It is a joy to see that the free activity of the Spirit which began the work and founded the assembly in Antioch was no more restive at the special gifts that ministered in their midst than it distrusted what the Lord had wrought by simple believers evangelizing as they could. It was not Barnabas and Saul only who laboured there, but prophets came down from Jerusalem, and one of them, Agabus, predicts a great dearth (as we know there was more than once) in the time of Claudius. Is it not of deep interest, the faith and love which responded to this though it was no charity sermon, without waiting for a call from saints already impoverished by their generous love after the great Pentecost which first saw the assembly here below? They believed in the coming scarcity, and thought of the saints in Jerusalem as truly 'one body'; and perhaps we may apply 1 Cor. 12: 26 here, if one suffer, so do all, and as they sympathize, they succour also. So even the Jews in Ezra's day were roused by the prophets to build, before the renewed intervention of their foes drew out the great king's decree that cancelled the usurper's prohibition. It is blessed to act on heavenly motives in earthly duties; and that what we do should be in the faith that ever honours God's word. So the links of love are maintained on both sides between Jerusalem and Antioch; and this, in things spiritual yet more than in the carnal, which it was their duty to repay, as Paul afterwards did not fail to remind others.

The task was entrusted to Barnabas and Saul through 'the elders', of whom we hear for the first time in the associations of the assembly. How they were installed in Judea we know not from the New Testament, but we have definite instruction in the sphere of the Gentile assemblies, as we may see in Acts 14: 23. The term as the office seems indeed to have been derived from Israel, as anyone can observe how it runs through the O.T. even from the earliest times. It was in force fully in the synagogue, as we may see in the N.T. Vitranga (*de Synag. Vet.*) discusses this at length. 'Bishop' is now everywhere acknowledged as synonymous, but is apparently derived rather from a Gentile source, though frequently found in the LXX., and pointing to oversight or inspection; as 'elder' did to a man of years, and hence apart from age to a senator. In or out of Palestine each synagogue had its 'elderhood'; and the same order reappears in the assembly. It is absurd to confound this fact with 'the minister' of a church so-called in modern times. Their place was to preside, though some might teach. An exclusive title to preach or teach is unknown to the N.T., nay more, it contradicts the fundamental

constitution of the assembly in which God sets all variety of gifts for exercise within and without.

Acts 12

The last chapter began with liberty for the Gentiles, vindicated in Jerusalem, and ended with love flowing out to the brethren in Judea from the assembly at Antioch. This drew Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem. God had not forgotten Jerusalem because He was gathering souls in Antioch, nor was He unmindful of the apostles of the circumcision because He had raised up a suited and energetic envoy for the nations. Nevertheless it is not in the same way that His name was to be celebrated even in the same outburst of persecution. The former had scattered the saints except the apostles; the new trial broke out against the apostles, and in particular against James and Cephas, two of the foremost, one slain and the other kept to be slain: so at least the king had purposed.

'Now at that season Herod the king put forth his hands to injure some of those from the assembly. And he slew James, the brother of John, with [the] sword. And seeing that it was agreeable to the Jews, he went on to seize Peter also (but they were the¹ days of unleavened bread); whom, having taken, he also put in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep, purposing after the passover to bring him forth unto the people.

'Peter, then, was kept in the prison; but prayer was earnestly² made by the assembly unto God concerning² him. And when Herod was about to bring him forward, on that night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards before the door were keeping the prison. And, behold, an angel of [the] Lord stood by, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck the side of Peter, and awoke him, saying, Rise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals, and he did so. And he saith to him, Throw thy cloak round thee and follow me. And going out he followed³ and knew not that what was being done by the angel was true, but thought he was seeing a vision. And when they came through a first guard and a second, they came unto the iron gate that readeth unto the city, which of itself opened to them; and having gone out they went forth one street, and immediately the angel departed from him. And Peter, on coming to himself, said, Now I know truly that [the] Lord sent forth His angel and took me out of Herod's hand and all the expectation of the people of the Jews. And, being conscious, he came unto the house of Mary the mother of John that was surnamed Mark, where were many assembled and praying. And when he⁴ knocked at the door of the gate-way, there came forward a maid to listen, by name Rhoda; and, recognizing Peter's voice, she did not for joy open the gate, but ran in and reported that Peter was standing before the gate-way. And, they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she kept maintaining that it was so; and they said, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking, and on opening they saw him and were amazed. And, beckoning to them with his hand to be silent, he related to them how the Lord brought him out of the prison; and he said, Report these things to James and to the brethren. And he went out and proceeded unto another place.

1 Some high authorities (Å BHLP, *et al.*) omit the article.

2 The adjective form is most common in the MSS., as is 'for'.

3 Text. Rec. adds 'him', which the most ancient authorities do not express.

4 The more recent copies say 'Peter'.

'And when it was day there was no small disturbance among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. But Herod, having sought him out without finding [him], examined the guards and commanded [them] to be led away [? to execution], and he went down from Judea unto Caesarea and stayed

[there]' (vers. 1-19).

Thus, if one of the sons of Zebedee was to be preserved the last of the twelve, the other fell a victim to the sword of Herod Agrippa, the first martyr among the apostles. The king was in no way a violent arbitrary monarch, like his grandfather, Herod the Great; but as *he* sought to ingratiate himself with the Romans, so did this grandson of his with the Jews. And those who seemed to be pillars in the church afforded the readiest means and objects to gratify Jewish spite. But God's thoughts are not as man's, and, though the Lord had already shown by what death Peter should glorify God, the time was not yet come: 'When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.' Herod meant not merely to imprison Peter but to bring him before the people, perhaps for sentence, for execution certainly as a public example. But the Passover intervened; and Herod was too scrupulous a devotee to slight the days of unleavened bread.

Meanwhile the assembly made earnest prayer, whilst the king delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep. Deliverance was at hand, which the church scarcely expected more than the king feared it. As usual, it was just before the critical moment. 'At evening time there shall be light.' That night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, not only bound with two chains, but sentinels before the door keeping guard of the prison. All seemed sure on the world's side, and on the other Peter rested in peace through the grace of the Lord Who neither slumbers nor sleeps; when behold, His angel stood by and roused him, freeing Peter of his chains, and minutely directing him, who, as in a vision, complied with each word as he was bidden. Nor did he come to himself till they had passed the two-fold watch, and the iron gate opened of its own accord, not to let the angel in but to let Peter out; and they had advanced one street off, when the angel departed. Then Peter realized his deliverance, and in full consciousness of all went to Mary's, where many were met for prayer — we cannot surely doubt — about him who knocked at the door. Nor was it fear but joy that led the maid Rhoda (or as we would say, Rose), who recognized the well-known voice, to run back and tell the news, that Peter was standing without. Luke, who all through presents the truth vividly, in no way hides the scanty faith of the saints, who could scarcely have forgotten how Jehovah's angel before now opened the prison-doors and brought out the apostles when placed in public custody by the envious high priest and his Sadducean party. Faith appropriates as well as remembers for present need.

Now it was neither the priest nor the people, but the king, to please the Jews; but what of God? If magnified in the death of James, He would be more in preserving Peter alive, whatever the pleasure of the people or their rulers. The testimony had been already fully given, even in the temple; and there was no command now to stand and speak there 'all the words of this life.' They had heard and despised the gospel of Him risen and glorified, Whom they had rejected and crucified. Peter therefore was not to make a similar stand now, though the miracle was as great, but, according to the Lord's ordinary rule, when persecuted in this city, to flee into the other; as, after explaining all to the astonished company, he does at this time.

Cardinal Baronius treats with prudent reserve the story in the Breviary of James's preaching in Spain (where Compostella claims his burial!) with an equally curt reference to what is noted in the Roman Martyrology ('*quae consulat qui haec cupit*'1); but he has much to say of the alleged history of the other apostles, and above all of Peter at this juncture, as it had practical aims for the papacy. That he went to Rome then, and began his first year of reigning five and twenty years there as Pope, is the wildest of dreams, which is not only without a shred of scripture proof but in the strongest way is set aside by all that scripture does tell us. For God Who foreknew the vain and selfish wishes of men has taken care, not indeed so to speak that superstition and infidelity cannot pursue their several paths of shameless and disastrous self-will, but to give the faithful ample evidence for confuting the adversary

and for establishing in truth and peace all who honour His own written word.

1 Which those who desire to do so may consult for themselves.

The apostle Paul, long after A.D. 44 (15 or 16 years), writes to the Romans in terms which imply that no apostle had as yet visited the capital of the Gentile world, in terms expressive of his own ardent desire to impart some spiritual gift to the saints there, as one who built not on another man's foundation but recognized in Rome part of that measured province which God apportioned to him. This, which is but a single testimony out of several, is enough to dissipate the tale into thin air. How can upright Christians attach the least weight even to Eusebius of Caesarea, who retails the fable of 'another Cephas' to screen the apostle of the circumcision from the reluctant but necessary and instructive censure of the apostle of the Gentiles? And this is but a sample of his departure from plain scripture or contradiction of it. The word is silent where Peter went; and though one may not agree with the late Dean Alford that the expression in the end of verse 17 only implies that Peter left the house of Mary and may have stayed secretly in Jerusalem, we can think of intimations of places, not in Palestine only but among the Gentiles, where the apostle, according to the New Testament, was known. But for believers to build on conjectures is worse than idle, and tends to shake solid truth in the hands of those who least of all should allow themselves such a licence. That natural men should have most to say where scripture is reticent one can too well understand: they receive not the things of the Spirit of God, and cannot know them because they are spiritually discerned.

It is beautiful to remark the ways of God with His servants traceable already in this brief Book. First of all (Acts 4) we see Peter and John in custody and no miracle to abridge its short duration. Next, the twelve are imprisoned; but during the night Jehovah's angel opened the door and led them out to bear testimony in the temple to the exalted Jesus: whence they are brought before the council, beaten and dismissed, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonoured for the Name. Now, one apostle is slain with the sword, and another is delivered by Jehovah's angel on the eve of a similar design by a king whose habitual mildness toward the people (if we are to credit Josephus¹) did not certainly hinder extreme persecution of the truth when his religious zeal and his political vanity were offended. And his chagrin burst ruthlessly on the guards, as we learn in verses 18, 19, though not a tittle of evidence pointed to any guilty connivance on their part at the prisoner's escape. No wonder he saw fit to go down from Judea unto Caesarea.

1 Much nearer the truth is the account of Dion Cassius (H.R. 59: 24, ed. Sturz, iii. 700), who records the apprehension at Rome that the cruelty and lewd violence of Caius Caligula were not checked but helped on by this very Agrippa and Antiochus (IV. of Commagene) in the art of tyranny — τοὺς βασιλέας, ὡσπερ τινὰς τυραννοδιδασκάλους.

But this is not all. 'And he² was at bitter enmity with them of Tyre and Sidon; but with one consent they came to him, and, having won over Blastus the chamberlain of the king, sought peace, because their country was nourished by the king's. And on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel and seated on the throne,³ made an harangue unto them. And the people shouted thereon, A god's voice and not a man's. And immediately an angel of [the] Lord smote him, because he gave not the glory to God; and becoming worm-eaten he expired' (vers. 20-23). Such was the last act of this solemn drama, if so one may speak of a succession of scenes as full of interest as of profound instruction for man with God: one apostle slain; and another delivered by an angel: the church's prayers answered beyond their faith; the mortified tyrant next wreaking his vengeance on his guards, not on his intended victim; himself struck at the moment that he accepted the deifying homage of the multitude, when he that gave not the glory to God was given up to worms, even before he gave up the ghost. 'But the word

of God grew and multiplied.'

2 'Herod' is read in Text. Rec. after most.

3 It is literally the βῆμα, elsewhere in the Authorized Version translated 'judgment seat', or *suggestus*, for oratory, formal audience, or honourable reception, as well as for judicial investigation.

What a descent, after this tale so simply but most graphically told and pregnant with moral truth, to read the account of the same circumstances in the statement of the eminent Josephus! 'When the third year of his reign over all Judea was completed, he went to the city of Caesarea, which formerly was called Straton's Tower. There he instituted shows in honour of the emperor, knowing there was a festival for his safety. Thither flocked a multitude of the men of rank and distinction throughout the province. On the second day of the show, having put on a robe wrought all over with silver of astonishing texture, he came into the theatre early in the day. There the first beams of the sun shone on the silver, and dazzled with such surprising lustre as to fill with fear and awe those who gazed on him. Forthwith flatterers here and there, far from good to him, began their loud acclamations, calling him a god, and saying, Be propitious; and if hitherto we reproved thee as a man, henceforth we confess thee superior to human nature. The king rebuked them not, nor rejected the impious flattery; but after a little looked up and saw an owl sitting on a cord over his head, and understood that this was a messenger (or angel) of evil as it had formerly been of good (XVIII. vii. 1), and was struck with grief to the heart. Incessant torment to the bowels supervened with vehemence from the first. Then looking toward his friends he says, I your god am already ordered to depart this life, fate instantly confuting those expressions just now falsely said of me; for I that was called immortal by you am being hurried away already a dead man. The decision that God has willed must be accepted. Yet our life has been by no means despicable, but in a splendour that is counted happy. Saying this, he was tormented with an increase of agony, and in haste was borne into the palace; and rumour spread among all that the king was at the point of death. Then immediately the multitude with wives and children clothed in sackcloth by their country's law were supplicating God on behalf of the king. And all was full of wailing and lamentations. And the king lying in a chamber on high gave himself up to tears as he saw them prostrate below on their faces, but after five days' continual pains in the bowels he departed this life in the fifty-fourth year of his age and the seventeenth of his reign' (Opera 871-872, ed. Hudson).

Even J. D. Michaelis remarks that this may be better Greek than Luke's, but is far less probable history. I should say it is a Jew's history of what substantially was undeniable fact among the Jews, written to please, and ingratiate them with, their Roman masters. Luke gives us the mind of Christ, as far removed as possible from the taint of ecclesiastical legends. See even the comparatively sober Eusebius' H.E. II. 10, where he tells us that the consequences of the king's attempt against the apostles were not long deferred, but the avenging minister of divine justice soon overtook him after his plots against the apostles. Now it is on the face of the inspired narrative that Luke calmly states the facts (not without laying bare the motive) of James's death and Peter's imprisonment with a like close designed. But all is said with grace and dignity: expressed feeling is wholly absent. The stroke which cut short the self-exalting monarch beyond doubt turns on his acceptance of the impious incense which the unhallowed fawning of his court and the multitude offered to him. People may talk of similar profanity unpunished in Roman emperors or others; but Herod Agrippa professed scrupulous Judaism, and therefore fell under His hand, Who waits for a later day before dealing with the nations that know not God. How different man's word from God's!

But, further, Eusebius goes on to notice the coincidence of Josephus's account with that of scripture, but in citing formally the Jewish historian he leaves out 'tine owl', and simply quotes 'an

angel sitting above his head'. Such is the honesty of the Christian father. It is not improbable that 'the owl' was introduced once, or perhaps both times, in the tale of Agrippa to meet Roman taste for auguries, but we can have no hesitation in branding the bad faith of the Bishop of Caesarea in dropping, without a word of explanation, 'the owl' from the cited language of Josephus. It is easy, after this fashion, to make stories agree, and to express one's admiration of it; but such a deceitful handling of things, not uncommon in the early writers, and in full bloom among the medievals, deserves the reprobation of all who love the truth.

How chastened the triumphant note that follows! 'But the word of God grew and multiplied (ver. 24). Compare Acts 6: 7; Acts 19: 20. Its sphere enlarged as its agents increased, the weakness of too many that received it could not hide its own weight and value, any more than the mighty adversaries who had to fall before a Mightier that was behind it.

The last verse is a transition to the still more important movement from Antioch which follows. It shows us two of the highest rank in the assembly not ashamed to render diaconal service toward the poor saints in Jerusalem. Such remembrance had the pillars there; and certainly Paul could say later with truth that he was zealous to do this very thing, as we know how near it had ever been to the heart of Barnabas. We shall hear more ere long of John Mark. 'And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, having fulfilled the service, taking also with them John surnamed Mark' (ver. 25). But we may remark even here that there is no real reason to doubt that he was the future writer of the second Gospel, which traces by divine inspiration the blessed and only perfect service of our Lord Jesus. Mark was now for a while the companion of His servants, one of them to be unequalled in labours and sufferings for Christ. We shall soon see how Mark fared. If he failed, love failed not. And recovery by grace is precious in its way, as is yet more the grace that enables the weak to stand by faith.

Acts 13

Peter, with the exception of his part in the council held in Jerusalem (Acts 15), disappears from the inspired history before us. Another figure comes not merely into prominence, but into centrality even from this, the first chapter of what may be justly regarded as the second volume of the Book of Acts. Not from Jerusalem but from Antioch (already so remarkable for Christian zeal impressing itself strikingly on those without, as well as for the first corporate stand made or mentioned among the Gentiles), we hear of a mission by the Holy Ghost.

'Now there were at Antioch in the assembly that was [there]¹ prophets and teachers: Barnabas and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenean, and Manaen foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said Separate Me "Barnabas and 2Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they let them go. They then, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down unto Seleucia and thence sailed away unto Cyprus, and when they were at Salamis, they announced the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they had also John as attendant. And having gone through the whole³ island unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a Jewish false prophet, whose name [was] Bar-Jesus, who was with the pro-consul Sergius-Paulus, an intelligent man. He, having called to [him] Barnabas and Saul; desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name interpreted) opposed them, seeking to turn away the pro-consul from the faith. But Saul who also [is] Paul, filled with [the] Holy Spirit, ⁴with fixed look at him said, O full of all guile and all trickery, devil's son enemy of all righteousness wilt thou not cease perverting the Lord's right ways? And now behold [the] Lord's hand [is] upon thee; and thou shalt be blind, not

seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell upon him a mist and darkness, and he went about seeking persons to lead him by hand. Then the pro-consul seeing what was done believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord' (vers. 1-12).

1 ABD, more than six cursives, *et al.*, and almost all the ancient Versions do not read *τινες* 'some', or 'certain', as in the majority.

2 Text. Rec. has *τε* with slight authority, but *τόν* before *Σαῦλον* has large support.

3 *ὄλην* is authenticated by the best authority, though omitted in Text. Rec. with most MSS.

4 Text Rec. in ver 9 follows many in giving the copulative.

None can deny a plurality of gifted men, five of high rank in full service of Christ, and this expressly in 'the church that was at Antioch.' 'Churches' in the same place, each with its own minister, we see here as everywhere ignored. It is not meant that the faithful may not have met to break bread regularly in many houses here or there, as we know they did in Jerusalem; but none the less did they in that city as in every other constitute 'the assembly' there. Unity prevailed, which only the Holy Spirit could form or maintain; not unity invisible or for heaven merely and admitting of actual diversity or even antagonism, but rather living and manifest unity on earth: which as yet the gifts, and the elders where they existed, subserved, instead of being the instruments of expressing their independency.

It is also to be observed that these five prophets and teachers are named neither in worldly style nor in ecclesiastical rank; otherwise Barnabas had not been first, still less had Saul been last. They seem rather arranged in the order of spiritual birth — at any rate so far as they were known to the saints in Antioch. He who was Herod the tetrarch's foster-brother is neither first nor last. But the gracious power of the Lord according to His word in Matt. 20: 16 was soon to make first in the testimony of His truth him who here occupies the last place.

'Whilst they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Separate Me [now] Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' The ministering to the Lord here must not be confounded with His service in preaching or teaching; it was no doubt mainly prayer and intercession. That the Lord's supper was concerned is a crude and unfounded idea; for this supposes the fellowship of saints in the remembrance of Christ, and in its principle contemplates all saints, whereas the 'ministering' here was simply on the part of the fellow-labourers, it may be presumed, that the Lord might be pleased to direct and bless the work, and that each of them might be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, prepared unto every good work. This is confirmed by the fasting which accompanied their spiritual action toward the Lord, expressive as it of course is of the outward nature abased that the inner might be the more undividedly before Him, rather than of the chief public occasion of the church's thanksgiving and united praise.

It is probable that the Holy Spirit may have used one or more of the prophets to convey the mind of God as to the work to which He had summoned Barnabas and Saul. So it appears to have been in Timothy's case (1 Tim. 1: 18; 1 Tim. 4: 14), though we see direct action in that of Philip (Acts 8: 29). Here, whatever the channel, the word was not to the church, as Alford assumes, but to the fellow-labourers as a whole to separate those two for the special work before them. The language is very expressive of the Spirit's personal interest and authority as One here below immediately concerned in the highest and most intimate degree. It is the Spirit Who says, 'I have called them.' Neither Barnabas nor Saul was now called for the first time authoritatively to the service of Christ; for, even the younger of the two had laboured notoriously and efficiently for years, both in the gospel and in the church. Ordination by brethren of a rank inferior to themselves would be the result gained by men who are

precipitately anxious to extract that rite from the passage. If there was any such thing in the case, the proceedings would be irreconcilable with all its acknowledged principles, and for episcopacy in particular. But the 'separation' here described is of a wholly distinct nature and with a different purpose, as the intelligent reader cannot but see if unbiased. Certain it is that Gal. 1: 1 repudiates, with marked precision, what many ancients and moderns have erroneously founded on the interesting and instructive circumstance before us. Paul declares that he was apostle (not of men as source, nor by man as channel, but) by Jesus Christ and God the Father Who raised Him from the dead. It would have admirably suited his judaizing detractors to have argued that he owed his ministerial title to the three teachers at Antioch who laid their hands on him and Barnabas; but bold as his old adversaries were at Corinth or in Galatia or elsewhere, we are not told that they dared to go so far in their insinuations. Clearly his own statement precludes summarily and for ever all effort thus to lower his apostleship or, what comes to much the same result, to exalt ordination at the expense of the apostle Paul in this place or any other.

The third verse confirms the remarks made on the early words of verse 2, for here we have again fasting with prayer. But though an initiatory ceremony assuming to convey holy orders is not here intended, yet do we see a holy and solemn tone sustained in striking contrast with that which prevails in some modern forms mistakenly built on it. The 'charge' and the 'dinner' suit well those for whom fasting and prayer offer no attractions. 'Ember days' may be formal enough, but at least resemble more and might be morally better. The Lord was the one object then, and the Holy Spirit wrought in power, and a service of self-abnegation to God's glory was the blessed fruit. The outward acts flowed from the life within. So with the laying on of hands. It was a general sign of identification, or of blessing given. In the case before us their fellow-labourers solemnly commended the honoured pair to the grace of God with this seal of their own fellowship in the work.

'They sent them forth' is here objectionable; because it might be, as it has been, interpreted to mean the mission to which they had authorized Barnabas and Saul. But the word chosen excludes such a thought and simply means 'let them go' without a shadow of commission in it. The idea of mission is conveyed forcibly in the beginning of verse 5: 'They then, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down unto Seleucia and thence sailed away unto Cyprus, and, when they were at Salamis they announced the word in the synagogues of the Jews; and they had also John as attendant. And having gone through the whole island unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a Jewish false prophet, whose name [was] Bar-Jesus, who was with the pro-consul Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man.'

Thus we see Saul, not only called by the glorified Christ from heaven, but now sent out with his elder companion by the Spirit from the city remarkable for being the first directly named assembly among the nations. Here took place the apostle's 'separation' (comp. Rom. 1: 1) unto gospel work, though not his only. All was outside Jerusalem and the twelve. His call was heavenly, his mission toward the Gentiles and from the bosom of the first Gentile assembly; but the energy and direction were of the Holy Spirit, though his fellow-servants testified their communion with' the two in their work. John Mark waited on them in person, and no doubt helped on the work in his measure. To call him chaplain or deacon would be ridiculous, if such perversion could admit of such a feeling. It is humbling that godly men should descend so low. Let modern practice rest on its true basis: scripture is no warrant for it.

We may notice the practice of the apostle which answered to the principle so familiar in his inspired words, 'to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.' When at Salamis they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. It was indeed the only place of a religious sort where any such liberty existed. And such also was God's order till Jerusalem was destroyed, or at least the Epistle to

the Hebrews was written, when the 'no difference' which the gospel declares found a yet more manifest and final application. But till then the door was open, and those who possessed a Jewish title were free therein to read or expound the scriptures.

But it was at its capital, Nea Paphos (not exactly the spot so celebrated as the dissolute seat of Aphrodite's worship), that the gospel came into collision, not with Jewish prejudice only, but with this intensified and embittered by religious imposture and sorcery. 'And when they had gone through the whole island unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer (or magician), a Jewish false prophet, whose name [was] Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. He having called to [him] Barnabas and Saul sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is interpreted his name) withstood them, seeking to turn aside the proconsul from the faith.' Salamis being on the east, as Paphos on the west, they had to cross the island as a whole; as the best copies say, though this is omitted in the common text. The interest of the Roman governor aroused the jealous opposition of the corrupt Jew who had had influence over a mind shocked with demoralizing idolatry but open to displays of power, not without some show of revelation. What could be more overwhelming to the Jewish impostor's influence than the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ? But the pro-consul¹ (not 'deputy' or legate, as in the Authorized Version) had a conscience in exercise and by grace an ear for the truth, which soon turned toward that which was of God, when the testimony reached his soul. Bar-Jesus (= son of Jesus, or Joshua) called himself 'Elymas', the wise man, or magician which was a title apparently akin to the Oriental 'Ulemah'. This wickedness drew out the solemn rebuke of Saul (henceforward called Paul)² accompanied by a sentence from God which the Holy Ghost gave him not only to utter but to execute. The rareness of such judicial inflictions under the gospel makes their occurrence all the more impressive.

¹ Wiclif and the Rhemish, guided by the Vulgate, say '*pro-consul*'; Tyndale, Cranmer, and the Geneva Version give the vague 'ruler of the country'. It is of the more moment to be exact, as Cyprus under the Romans had been imperial and hence governed by a *pro-praetor*; but not long before it had been handed over by Augustus to the people, which involved government by a pro-consul, ἀνθύπατος instead of the former ἀντιστράτηλος.

² We need not speculate on the question whether the apostle had always two names, a Jewish one and a Gentile or Roman; or whether the latter may have been now given at this epoch, if not incident, when he entered publicly on his work among the Gentiles.

The apostle then, 'filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his eyes on him, and said, O full of all guile and all trickery (villainy or craft), devil's son, enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease perverting the Lord's right ways? And now, behold, [the] Lord's hand [is] upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell upon him a mist and darkness, and he went about seeking leaders-by-hand' (vers. 9-11).

Sergius Paulus was precisely in the state for such an intervention to affect him profoundly. And we too can mark the difference of God's dealing here, as compared with the Samaritan who offered a deeper affront if possible by the proposal to buy the power of conferring the Spirit on others. For he had been baptized, and is warned of his awful state, but exhorted to pray and repent. Bar-Jesus becomes the striking figure of the Jews, blinded themselves, in their effort to turn aside the blind Gentiles from the light of life. Yet it is not for ever, but 'for a season'; as God will give them in due time to look on Him Whom they once rejected unto death to their own loss and ruin meanwhile.

'Then the pro-consul when he saw what was done believed, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord' (ver. 12)

This is worthy of all consideration. It was not the wonder which struck him most, but the truth he was taught. The miracle arrested him, no doubt, as well it might; but how many like Simon Magus may have been amazed, beholding signs and great powers wrought! Faith grounded on such evidence is only natural, and has no divine root. The senses are struck, the reason is convinced, the mind receives the testimony, and the mouth confesses it. But there is no life apart from conscience exercised about one's own evil before God, and from Christ the object of the soul as the gift of God's love to a guilty sinner in pure grace. This was true of Sergius, not of Simon. The one was amazed at the miracle, the other at least as much or more at the teaching which brought God before his soul and himself into His presence. This only is effectual. It is eternal life

And this is just the difference between a true divine work in the soul and a mind convinced by evidence or earned along by tradition. The latter may be all well in itself, and be a reasonable homage to facts which cannot be got rid of fairly but which compel honest acknowledgment from all who bow to adequate proofs. Yet this may be and is where the soul has never met God in the conscience, where sin and even our own sins are not an unbearable burden, where the love is not trusted that gave His only-begotten Son and laid the burden on Him to suffer atoningly that the believer might have life, pardon, and peace. No displays of power, however wonderful, are so amazing in the eyes of faith as the grace of God in saving the lost through His own Son. This the governor was enabled to receive from God, and not a word more do we hear of the great man. The gospel gives to the greatest on earth; but it receives no glory from man. One Man only it proclaims 'exalted in the highest'. In Him we may and ought to boast, for He is the Lord; and His grace in saving us, yea, in making us one with Himself on high to God's glory, is the wonder of wonders.

Henceforward, save perhaps under the shadow of Jerusalem (Acts 15: 12, 25), Paul has the chief place, as is indeed conveyed by the well-known phrase, not so used elsewhere in the New Testament (Mark 4: 10, Luke 22: 49), but familiar in the best writings of Greece (Plato *Crat.* 440 C.; Xenophon *Anab.* vii. 4, 16; Thucydides v. 21; viii. 63), οἱ περὶ Παῦλον (*lit.*, 'those around Paul'), Paul and his company.

'Now Paul and his company, having sailed from Paphos, came unto Perga of Pamphylia; and John departing from them returned unto Jerusalem. But they passing through from Perga came unto Antioch of Pisidia, and having gone into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying Brethren (*lit.* Men-brethren), if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, speak' (vers. 13-15).

The defection of John here is remarked by the Holy Spirit. It was not a trifle in God's mind, and the difference it occasioned afterwards, when Barnabas would have joined him again with Paul, proved serious for servants so ardently and justly attached. John had not faith and courage for the work opening before them and returned to Jerusalem where were his mother and the associations so dear to the natural heart. But on the other hand we must not exaggerate with those who affirm that a stumble is fatal. It may be so in a horse; but one might suppose that Christian men better knew both their own probable experience and the teaching of scripture expressly in this very case. Grace turned past failure to future profit, and at a later day the great apostle was as earnest to commend his ministry as he could not but blame the failure when in progress.

We next see Paul and Barnabas at Antioch of Pisidia in the synagogue on the sabbath. It is remarkable what measure of liberty was enjoyed. After the reading of the law and the prophets, a message came to them from the synagogue-rulers to speak if they had any word of exhortation for the people. Can there be a more painful contrast with the habits of Christendom? Assuredly one might

from scripture expect more liberty where grace rules than among those born and bred in the trammels of the law. Yet who ever hears of such an invitation nowadays? So completely has the church departed from the enjoyment of that holy liberty, which is characteristic of the Spirit of the Lord. In this case too the visitors were but strangers, unknown to any, it would seem, save as grave godly-looking Jews. Routine governs in modern times on solemn public occasions, were the strangers ever so well known by report for their gifts and labours and life.

It was Paul who rose to address the congregation. 'And Paul stood up and beckoning with the hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God,¹ hear. The God of this people chose out our fathers and exalted the people in their sojourn in [the] land of Egypt and with a high arm brought them out of it, and for a time of about forty years bore them nurse-like in the desert, and when He had destroyed seven nations in [the] land of Canaan, He gave them their land for an inheritance, in about four hundred and fifty years. And after these things He gave judges until Samuel the prophet and then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of [the] tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And having removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also bearing witness He said, I found David, son of Jesse, a man according to My heart, who shall do all My will. From his seed, according to promise, did God bring to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, when John had preached before [*lit.* before the face of] His entrance a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was fulfilling his course, he said, What suppose ye that I am? I am not [He], but behold, there cometh One after me the sandal of Whose feet I am not worthy to loose' (vers. 16-25).

1 The place given to Gentile proselytes is here in the apostle's address distinctly marked for the first time.

It is all-important to observe the basis of fact on which the gospel hinges, no less than the hopes of Israel. It is not so in the religious systems of men. In India, for instance, all is but speculation and reasoning as in ancient heathenism, mere fable. So it is with the Buddhist and the Confucian systems. Nor is it different with Mohammedanism, as far as it puts forth any distinctive claim. Nowhere do men even pretend to a substratum of fact such as that on which repose both the Old and the New Testaments respectively. Shake the facts and their foundations are alike gone. If the facts abide irrefragable, the most momentous consequences ensue both to faith and to unbelief. And although there are weighty differences in the history of the Old Testament as compared with the one commanding figure of Christ in the New, there is nothing more marked and unstinting than the seal of truth which the New everywhere puts upon the certainty of the Old in all the wonders it records. This is the more striking because the New Testament has no enemies more determined and deadly than the Jews, to whose custody the ancient oracles were committed. The witnesses of the New Testament, on the contrary, maintain a uniform and unhesitating testimony to the absolute truth of the Old Testament; which they prove to have no adequate result, apart from the appearing and work of the Lord Jesus. And we may add that there is no sufficient key to the present abnormal state of the Jews, without taking into account the rejected and suffering but risen Messiah; on which rock they have made shipwreck through unbelief, however else they themselves essay to explain their actual ruin as a people.

Accordingly there come to view these solemn yet plain facts, which only prejudice can overlook or deny. On the one hand the real, living, priceless value not only of the New Testament but of the Old is found by sovereign goodness in the church of God. On the other hand, alas! the ancient people of God have ears but they hear not, eyes but they see not, and hearts which do not understand at all for the present; else conversion, healing, and glory would doubtless be theirs. For the light and the love of God, inseparable from Him Who sits at His right hand on high, are only enjoyed among those who

were once dogs of the Gentiles, but are now, in pure mercy yet according to the righteousness of God in Christ, made free of the riches of His grace and the counsels of His glory in Christ the Lord.

First the dealings of God from His choice of the fathers are at once connected with the exodus of the people from Egypt, and His nurture of them in the wilderness till He gave them to inherit the land. It is the Pentateuch and Book of Joshua in miniature, centring in Israel beloved for the fathers' sake. The gospel confirms, instead of annulling, God's love to Israel, though it announces 'some better thing for us' as in Heb. 11: 40.

The reader will notice the beautiful expression of verse 18 weakened in the more favourite ancient MSS. BCcorr DHLP, *et al.*, but happily preserved in ACpm. E, as well as in most of the ancient versions, as it seems truest to the Hebrew in Deut. 1: 31 which the apostle, beyond just doubt, had in view. Here Tregelles and Westcott and Hort¹ part from most moderns as well as others of weight.

1 As usual, the note of the Cambridge Editors is ingenious, so much so as to overshoot the mark. But to bear in the sense of 'carry is not the same as 'to be patient with', and both Deuteronomy and the apostle are dwelling on God's favour to His people, rather than on their bad manners, as Chrysostom long ago remarked.

In verses 19, 20 there is a notable difference from the common words. It is not giving by lot which is the point, though in itself true, as (by the least and lowest possible testimony) in the received text, but causing them to inherit their land. But here there is a more united front among the editors of late; for, excepting Dean Alford, almost all accept ABC, *et al.*, and the ancient versions save the Syrr. and Aeth. This connects the date of 'about 450 years' with the accomplishment of the promised inheritance (under law, which made nothing perfect). The common text makes it the duration of the judges.

But it appears to me that the dative of epoch suits the sense of the critical text as distinctly as it disagrees with the common one. Both before and after this phrase the accusative is given to express a term of continuance, here only the dative. Now if the idea intended were the supply of judges for 450 years, the accusative would here also be the natural construction. At any rate, it is a date within which a certain action occurred, and not duration as in the other cases. If the oldest vouchers be accepted, it was in about 450 years that Israel was made to inherit this land, after the promise to 'our-fathers', i.e., from the birth of Isaac as the starting-point. Indeed so Junius and others take the common reading, not as the space for which judges were given but in which God had fulfilled His promise at least provisionally, till judges were given in the low estate of His people. It cannot therefore be assumed that Paul assigns a duration of 450 years to the judges, and so invalidates the date (in 1 Kings 6: 1) of 480 years from the Exodus to the founding of Solomon's temple. More than one period of considerable duration has been added to the space of the Judges which really fell within other assigned dates. But it suffices here to note that the extended space for judges drawn from the verses before us is illegitimate. Ussher (*Works* xii. 70; xiv. 340) firmly holds to the integrity of both the Hebrew and the Greek in both these scriptures, rejecting the bold conjectures of Luther and others as wholly needless and of course improper.

The apostle then rapidly sketches God's deep and constant interest in His people till a king was given, but stops with David, the known type of the Messiah as his own psalms abundantly testify. From him easy transition is made to his promised seed, whom, he declares, God 'brought'¹ to Israel a Saviour, Jesus (ver. 23). Was not this like Him? Was it not assured in the law and the prophets as well as the psalms? Were the Jews not looking for Him? Did they not miserably need Him?

1 'Raised up', as in the Text. Rec. supported by CD and many other authorities, has a weight far below what I adopt, and was due probably to the language of the preceding verse.

Nor could it be said that God had failed to attest His long promised intervention by renewed testimony, the more impressive because the living voice of a prophet was unheard for more than four centuries after Malachi. And as all took John for a prophet, so did our Lord bear witness to him as more than a prophet, being Jehovah's messenger before Messiah's face to prepare the way before Him: Isaiah and Malachi had previously intimated it. So, before the face of His entering in, John preached a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel; nor was it moral only, in self-judgment before God, but saying unto them that they should believe on Him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus. It was avowedly a token of His manifestation to Israel (John 1: 31). Of the Baptist's meaning which they quite mistook, ready as human nature is to exaggerate man and to depreciate God, no ground for doubt was left by the forerunner: 'And as John was fulfilling his course, he said, What suppose ye that I am? I am not [He]; but behold, there cometh One after me the sandal of Whose feet I am not worthy to loose;' Here again were new facts which could not be disputed. John is spoken of as a known witness, though none knew better than Paul that grace alone gives the truth efficaciously by delivering from the self-will which enables Satan to forge his chains of dark unbelief. But who knew better than he to press the value of a testimony which he too once had ignored like the rest, and would now commend as having proved its worth?

Next comes Paul's appeal, but an appeal grounded on fresh facts of the gravest and most affecting significance.

'Brethren [Men-brethren], sons of Abraham's race, and those among you that fear God, to us¹ was the word of this salvation sent forth. For the dwellers in Jerusalem and their rulers, having ignored Him and the voices of the prophets that are read on every sabbath, fulfilled [them] by judging [Him]. And though they found no cause of death, they besought Pilate that He might be slain. And when they fulfilled all things written about Him, they took [Him] down from the tree and put [Him] into a tomb, but God raised Him from [the] dead, and He appeared for many days to those that came up with Him from Galilee unto Jerusalem, the which are now His witnesses unto the people' (vers. 26-31).

1 'Us' ABD *et al.* The mass support 'you'; but 'us' includes the witnesses benignly. The you' just before may have got repeated.

The sending forth to Israel of 'the word of this salvation' (for no less does the gospel carry) stands solemnly confronted by the stubborn ignorance of those who most boasted, the dwellers in Jerusalem and their rulers; who had the voices of the prophets read sabbath by sabbath, yet fulfilled them in unbelief, knowing neither themselves nor Him Whom they presumed to judge, the Judge of Israel smitten on the cheek, the Judge of quick and dead hung on the tree, the meek and most holy bearer of all curse from God and man on the cross. Yes, they blindly fulfilled all things written by God concerning Him, law, psalms, and prophets centring in Him Whom most of all they ought to have known Whom least they knew; for their eye was not single, and their body full of darkness consummated in the death of their own Messiah extorted from the reluctant Pilate, blind indeed and not without warning and moral witness, the contrary of the false witnesses that destroyed each other, but not so blind as they who said they saw, and so their sin remained and remains alas, to this day!

'But God raised Him from the dead.' Paul differs not from Peter in putting forward this foundation-truth of the gospel. What a fact proved by all conceivable evidence, that grace could, would, and did supply, of which such a thing admits suitably to God's character and glory as well as man's sin and folly! Nor is it only 'the great exception' to rebuke the vanity, pride, and will of

unbelieving man; but what a spring and supply of peace, light, joy and blessing to all who believe!

Here, however, it is not the victory of righteousness, which God's grace secures and gives freely to faith, that is set forth and that the apostle loved to enlarge as to the saints, but the demonstration of the world's and especially of Israel's blindness, when they had unconsciously fulfilled all that was written concerning Him till they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. 'But God raised Him from the dead.' It was not only the object of promise come, but also, when all through unbelief seemed lost in His rejection and death, God's intervention in raising Him up from among the dead. To this answers nearly the beginning of the Epistle to the Romans, where the Lord Jesus is presented, first, as Son of David according to the flesh, then, as Son of God in power by resurrection of [the] dead according to the Spirit of holiness. Glad tidings in good sooth! glad tidings of a victory over all that sin could do up to death itself. The victory over evil is won in Satan's last stronghold by God's grace in Christ, that man may believe and be saved before He executes judgment on His persistently unbelieving adversaries. It is therefore no question of man's desert, for righteousness he has none before God, but unrighteousness much in every way. God's righteousness alone avails, God being righteous in His estimate of the efficacy of Christ, and above all of His death, on behalf of those who in themselves are wholly lost.

But here the apostle points out the gracious care and wisdom of God in giving the risen Christ to be 'seen', and this not once or twice only, but 'many days'. Now who could be valid witnesses of this stupendous fact? Comparative or absolute strangers to His person, or those most familiar with Him when alive? Unquestionably the latter; and to such accordingly He appeared when risen, to the slowest of all to believe Him alive again for evermore, in proportion to their deep grief and disappointment over His cross and grave. His enemies remembered His words that He was to rise in three days, and vainly sought to make all sure by sealing the stone that closed the sepulchre and by the watch, which only turned to their own confusion, when the guards trembled and became as dead men through fear of the angel after the Lord arose. But the very slowness of His friends to believe, inexcusable as it was, turned to account when He was seen 'of those that came up with Him from Galilee unto Jerusalem, such as are now¹ His witnesses to the people'. The common text with more than one excellent MS. of antiquity omits the adverb, though it is really emphatic and important. They are at this moment, says the apostle, His witnesses to the Jews; and none the less does he insist on it because he was not one of them. Indeed with this class he contrasts himself and Barnabas; for grace provided another character of testimony if by any means the mouth of gainsayers might be stopped. Witnesses were raised up, who were wholly unacquainted with Him when here in the days of His flesh. Nay, Paul himself was bitterly hostile till He revealed Himself to and in His enemy, henceforth His devoted bondman, outside Damascus. What possible testimony other or more could be wisely given or desired? Alas! unbelief of God is as deadly in its nature and working, as in its source its aims, and its results.

¹ 'Now' is attested by AC, more than twenty cursives, and almost all the ancient versions. Hence even Tregelles goes with modern critics generally, and only Westcott and Hort bracket the word, presumably in deference to the Vatican.

From verse 32 comes the application of the facts as to the Messiah, already given in verses 23-31, especially His death on man's part, His resurrection on God's, not without ample witness of His appearing subsequently among those who knew Him best.

'And we (*we*, emphatic) declare to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God hath fulfilled this to us their children ¹ having raised up Jesus, as also in the seconds psalm it is

written, Thou art My Son: this day have I begotten Thee. But that He raised Him from [the] dead, no more to return unto corruption, He hath spoken thus, I will give you the faithful mercies of David; wherefore¹ also in another [psalm] He saith, Thou wilt not suffer Thy holy (merciful) One to see corruption. For David, having in his own generation served the counsel of God, fell asleep, and was added to his fathers, and saw corruption. But He Whom God raised up saw no corruption. Be it known to you therefore [men-] brethren, that through this [Man] remission of sins is preached to you; and² from all things from which ye could not in Moses' law be justified, in Him every one that believeth is justified' (vers. 32-39)

¹ 'To our children' is the strange reading of the most ancient authorities. So the 'first' psalm (D, *et al.*) ver. 33, but this may be due to Jewish arrangement combining Pss. i. and ii. in one; and 'because' for 'wherefore' in ver. 35

² 'And' is omitted by the most ancient authorities. Most of the late witnesses add 'the' to 'law of Moses'.

Here the apostle goes over the all-important points doctrinally. The coming of Christ was the accomplishment of the promise to the fathers their children had now the glad tidings of it in His person here below. The raising up of Jesus in verse 33 does not therefore go beyond the Child thus born, the Son thus given. And with this agrees Psalm 2: 7, which refers not to His resurrection from the dead, as many have supposed, but to His birth, as the words simply express it, so that a further or mystic meaning here is not only uncalled for but mistaken. He, the Messiah, born of woman, born under law, was the object, accomplisher, and heir of the promises. For, how many soever be the promises of God, in Him is the yea (2 Cor. 1: 20). So to the Romans (Rom. 1: 2, 3) the apostle describes himself as separated unto God's gospel (which, he adds parenthetically, He had before promised through His prophets in holy scriptures) concerning His Son come of David's seed according to flesh, just as it is treated here in the first place. But then he goes on, 'marked out Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection of the dead'; just as here too he proceeds to cite Isaiah 55: 3 and Psalm 16: 10 as prophecies of Christ's proper resurrection.

Indeed it is surprising that any intelligent and careful reader ever understood the passage otherwise. For it is as certain as it is plain that, to God's raising up the Messiah according to promise and the prophecy of the second psalm, verse 34 appends as another and still more momentous truth that God raised Him up 'from the dead'. It is no mere reasoning on the verse before, no epexegetic explanation, but a further teaching of the highest value. Hence it is thus introduced, 'And' or 'But that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return unto corruption, He hath spoken thus . . .' Calvin accordingly is justified in his statement¹ (*Opera vi. Comm. in loco*) that the word 'raised up' has a wider significance than where repeated just after. For it is meant that Christ was divinely ordained and as it were by God's hand brought forth into light that He might fulfil the office of Messiah, as scripture here and there also shows us kings and prophets raised up by the Lord. Acts 3: 22, 26, Acts 7: 37, are clear cases of this usage of 'raised up' in the same Book; so that the Authorized Version in the wake of Tyndale is not safely to be defended in going out of the way to insinuate resurrection into verse 33. 'Raised up' is correct; 'raised again', might have been said, if the text had certainly pointed, as it does not really at all, to the resurrection. But 'raised up again' is unjustifiable. In any case the compound can only yield either 'up' or 'again', not both; and here we have seen on good and cogent grounds that 'up' is right, 'again' inadmissible, because rising from the dead is not intended in verse 33.

¹ 'Hic suscitandi verbum, meo iudicio, latius pates quam ubi paulo post repetitur. Neque enim tantum dicit Christum resurrexisse a mortuis, sed divinitus ordinatum et quasi menu Dei productum in

lucem, ut Messiae parses impleret; sicut passim docet Scriptura, excitari a Domino reges et prophetas.'

It would not have been necessary or advisable to spend argument on the question, if Dean Alford and Canon Cook, following Hammond, Meyer, and others, had not unwittingly played into the hands of enemies who ridicule this very misapprehension of Psalm 2: 7, for which not Paul but his expounders are responsible. It has also been noticed that the addition of 'now' in the English Version of verse 34 is not only needless but misleading, as it might imply a previous turn to corruption. Here too Tyndale misled all the public Protestant versions since his day, even to the Revised one.

Psalm 2: 7 is quoted then for Christ as Son of God in this world. It is neither His eternal Sonship, as some of the earlier Christian writers conceived, nor His resurrection, as the misapprehension of Acts 13: 33 was used to teach. His birth *in time* as Messiah is the point, 'Thou art My Son: this day have I begotten Thee.'

Psalm 16: 10 is cited (ver. 35) in proof not of His Sonship as man and Messiah here below, but of His resurrection, and therefore stands in close and logical connection with verse 34. Peter had already used this Psalm similarly in Acts 2: 24-32; and it is strange that any who believe the Christian revelation can allow a doubt that Christ's resurrection is the just and only meaning of the tenth verse of the psalm. I do not speak of their modesty in preferring their opinion to Saint Paul's, if they count it becoming to slight the apostle Peter. The question is, is there such a thing as inspiration in any true sense?

The application of Isaiah 55: 3 in verse 34 is no less certain if we bow to apostolic authority, but not so easy, though, where seen, most instructive. But only the death and resurrection of the Messiah could make the covenant everlasting; only so could the promised holy or merciful blessings of David be made inviolable. Thus they are, as the LXX translate, τὰ ὅσια Δαυεὶδ τὰ πιστά. Thus only could the soul even of the Jew live, or the door of grace open widely enough to take in a Gentile. Hence it will be seen that the chapter in Isaiah begins with the call of God to 'every one that thirsteth'. He Who was lifted up on the cross will draw all, not Jews only; and a risen Messiah, though He thereby gives the utmost sureness to Israel's promises, cannot be bounded in His grace any more than in His glory, but will certainly have all peoples, nations, and languages to serve Him with an everlasting dominion.

It is difficult in any rendering short of a paraphrase to mark for the English reader the close link between the 'Holy One' in Psalm 16: 10 and the 'mercies' in Isaiah 55: 3. Verse 1 of Psalm 89 compared with verse 19 as in the Authorized Version may help: very far different is the Revised Version of the Psalm here which can only darken. But the reader should know that the true force in verse 19 is. 'Then speakest Thou in vision of Thy Merciful (or Holy) One', Who is the personal concentration of the sure mercies of which the Psalmist sings in verse 1. They are 'the mercies' of David no doubt, but, what is of all consequence, of Jehovah also; and so this psalm also everywhere speaks of David, and therefore confirms the truth in question. Christ beyond controversy is here in the mind and word of the Spirit of prophecy. Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel (in this case quite a distinct word and thought), speaks of Christ as His Holy or Gracious One. It is not the same truth which the same apostle asserts in Rom. 1: 4: Christ declared or determined Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection. The same power of the Spirit in which He ever walked superior to all evil was proved by resurrection. In Acts 13: 34 it is the holiness of grace and mercy manifested and operative in Him risen from the dead. After His baptism of suffering, known by Him as by none else, straitening was over, Jewish barriers righteously gone, the floods of grace could flow for ever and overflow.

The apostle of the uncircumcision, in verses 36, 37, reasons pretty much as he of the

circumcision in Acts 2: 29-31; and both with unanswerable power. But one man, the Messiah, was, while tasting death, to see no corruption. David in his own generation served the counsel of God, but saw corruption: as did all his descendants, save that One of Whom he in the Spirit prophesied. Scripture cannot be broken. One man alone does and must fulfil the condition: Who was He but Jesus, the Christ? As a fact the witnesses attested His resurrection on the fullest evidence, apart from the predictions. All proofs centre in Him. God's glory and love are His infinitely; so are man's salvation, blessing, holiness, service in every true way and to the highest degree of which the creature is capable.

And thereon the apostle, though of course limited by the state of his audience, brings out the message characteristically beyond what Peter had done to hearers more informed than those of Pisidia. 'Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this Man remission of sins is preached to you; and from all things from which ye could not in Moses' law be justified, in Him every one that believeth is justified' (vers. 38, 39). Was it not, is it not, grandly, yea divinely simple? What does a sinner supremely need? Forgiveness of sins. This the gospel proclaims: it is no question of a *promise* only. Remission of sins through Christ dead and risen is *preached*. It is a free gift of grace, as is eternal life in Christ: the two wants of a sinner are there alone found, and are by Him freely given. To all it is preached; there is no limit to the grace of Christ, any more than to the efficacy of His blood. Among those that hear the gospel it takes effect only upon all that believe. For faith glorifies the Saviour God, as it abases man the sinner; and repentance accompanies it, real if faith is, shallow or deep in like manner, or alas! as unreal as may be the faith. But faith owns God's grace in Christ, and so His righteousness revealed in the gospel. Of faith therefore is the blessing that it might be according to grace; and thus alone can either man be assured of it or God be glorified thereby.

But there is more than remission of sins, that most deeply needed, in itself inestimable but initiatory, boon of the gospel: 'And from all things, from which ye could not in Moses' law be justified, in Him every one that believeth is justified.' How boldly the apostle can speak! and this, not because his preaching or the style of it was any peculiarity of his position in the church, but in honour of the Saviour's victory over every hindrance and all evil. To speak timidly might be well, if it were simply a question of man addressing or of men addressed. But the preacher of the gospel is not only free but bound to forget himself by grace in his magnifying of Him Who died and rose, in order that divine mercy might triumph for the worst, and this without money and without price for the sinner: Christ has paid the penalty — paid it long long ago. Here Moses' law is wholly unavailing, whatever the pride, the unbelief, or the ignorance, of the Jew might think. There is no possibility of justification by that law, holy as it is, and the commandment holy and just and good. Law is all in vain to save. It can give neither life nor pardon, neither holiness nor power. It puts a restraint on, and so alike discovers and provokes, lust; it is the power of sin, and works out wrath, it is thus a ministration of condemnation and death. What possible deliverance can it bring to the needy and lost sinner? Negatively indeed the law is used by grace to break him down, to deepen his distrust of self even when converted, and to cast him wholly on Christ outside and on high, Who gives him to know that he died with Himself, that he might walk and serve under grace, as being alive to God

But the grace of God in the gospel justifies the believer 'from all things'. Indeed, if it were not so, how could the sinner's condition be met in a way worthy of God? If justification were partial, it might no less satisfy man, yea far more readily, than that free and full display of divine goodness in Christ which alone is the truth. Nothing is so excellent, so holy, so strengthening, so God-glorifying as the revelation of His grace in Christ, and this undiluted as well as unadulterated. But it seems extreme to some minds, lax to others, and dangerous to more. Consider Him in and by Whom the gospel came. He was wholly misunderstood and unintelligible to the 'wise and prudent'. As the mass believed not on

Him, so many from among the rulers did not confess Him through fear; for they loved the glory of men rather than the glory of God. Even John the Baptist was more reasonably right in their eyes than his Master and Lord; as those that refused Him Who came in His Father's name will by-and-by receive him that comes in his own. Nothing is so condemnatory of fallen man, and especially when he glories in his character or in his religion, as grace; nothing so foreign and even repulsive to his mind and to his self-righteousness. For it levels all mankind, high and low, learned and ignorant, loose or moral, superstitious or profane, in one indiscriminate grave of sin and ruin Godward — of spiritual death, whole it proclaims to faith, and only to faith, a present, full, and everlasting redemption. This is offensive to man's thought and title who can soon find reasons to argue himself into unbelief and rejection of God's word, as if it were but the opinion of fallible and mistaken man, and thus makes manifest his unremoved heart-enmity to God.

The work of grace however goes on, as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men. Conscience-stricken souls, hearts pining after God long slighted and sinned against, are won by the name of Jesus, and gladly receive that remission of sins which is preached to them, and adore as they take in the wonder of mercy in Jesus in Whom every one that believes is justified from all things, from none of which could he be justified in Moses' law or in any other way. Justification for a sinner is essentially a Pauline expression; being of faith, not of law, it was open to a Gentile as well as to a Jew. It was a word eminently suited to that great messenger of the gospel of God's grace. And here we have it tersely in the first discourse of his which Luke reports or at least summarizes. So deals God's righteousness which is now manifested apart from law: God just and justifying the believer as he is, the ungodly as he was (Rom. 3: 26; Rom. 4: 4). How truly divine! No wonder man as such misses the truth: Christ is the only key that opens all.

But the apostle does not conclude without a warning, appropriately drawn, for the Jews that listened with reluctant ears, from their own volume of inspiration. 'See therefore that what is spoken of in the prophets come not on you,¹ Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye will in no wise believe if one declare it to you' (vers. 40, 41). It is especially Habakkuk 1: 5 which is in substance cited, with perhaps Isa. 29: 14 and Prov. 1: 24-31 in view. Unbelief is the same evil scorn of God's word, whether of old or by-and-by, and never worse than now when grace beseeches men as they are to be reconciled to God. And whatever the work to be done in the future, none can ever match what God has wrought already, the basis on which the gospel is proclaimed to every creature. The coming execution of judgment by the Chaldeans was sufficient to arrest any soul that heeded the warning voice of the prophet Habakkuk; and a destruction was then about to fall on Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans, as the Lord had predicted (Luke 19: 43, 44; Luke 21: 20, 24). But what is either providential work of God or any other than can be gleaned from the harvest of judgment in the future when compared with that which in His rejection and atoning work befell our Lord Jesus?

¹ BD, some cursives, and a few Latin MSS. reject ἐφ' ὑμῶς.

And as the grace to sinners is immeasurable in the work which cost God and His Son all things in unsparing vengeance on sin — our sins, so is the wrath of God not yet executed, but revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and the unrighteousness of men that hold the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1: 18). If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? says the same apostle writing to the Hebrew confessors of Christ. Is there less sin, less danger, for those who in Christendom have grown up in the constant iteration of the same gospel, and are now exposed as men never were to the apostate infidelity of the day, which finds its life in nature and sets up physical law

as the idol of its worship, if first along with Jesus soon to supersede Him, as none can serve two masters. It must be God, or the creature, not both, even if God were not, as He ought to be, a jealous God, as He is the true, and therefore necessarily intolerant of all spurious rivalry.

Such was the discourse with which the great apostle of the Gentiles opened his missionary labours in the Pisidian Antioch (only about fifty years ago identified as Yalobatch by an intelligent British traveller). The result was cheering. And as they were going out (for the service was over, not interrupted as some have singularly imagined), the hearers besought that they might have these words spoken to them the next sabbath, the great occasion for such a discourse. Later, when the gathering was broken up, many of the Jews and the proselytes, attracted and impressed beyond the rest, followed Paul and Barnabas (for henceforth, at least away from Palestine, Paul has the precedence); as they on their part spoke more freely to them than the synagogue could permit, and urged them to abide in the grace of God. Gentiles there were none as yet to hear, beyond the proselytes but the ensuing sabbath beheld them drawn by the report in crowds; and the effect was as marked on them for good, as on many Jews for evil, as we shall see.

Verse 42 has suffered not a little from both copyists and from commentators. The ordinarily received text instead of 'they' (αὐτῶν), has, with some cursives, the interpolation ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τῶν Ἰουδαίων, which may have been due to the public lessons of early days, though more common in the passages taken from the historical books than in selections from the Epistles. But this addition, though unauthorized, does not contradict (though it may alter) the sense, like τὰ ἔθνη, 'the Gentiles', which is made the subject of the sentence, to the confusion of the passage as a whole, and without the least to commend it in itself. The verse is quite general. 'And as they were going out, they kept beseeching that these words might be spoken to them on the following sabbath. Now when the synagogue broke up, many of the Jews and of the worshipping proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who (οἵτινες) speaking unto them persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And on the next sabbath almost all the city was gathered together to hear the word of God'¹ (vers. 42-44).

1 Many ancient authorities, as is well known, concur in reading 'the Lord' for God'.

Dr. J. Bennett conceives that the critical reading of verse 42 points to the sense that they (i.e., Paul and Barnabas) entreated that the same things should be spoken to them (again). But this is quite a mistake. The true reading leaves us open to the people's thus entreating the apostles; which appears to me much more simple and becoming as well as 'delightful'. Even Calvin, who understands the sense to be that Paul and Barnabas went out while the Jews were yet assembled, holds that *they* (the apostles) were then requested . . ., though he was misled by the misreading to think it was the Gentiles who made request. But what could have brought 'the Gentiles' to the synagogue on the first sabbath? It is easy to understand that they flocked there on the second, and doubtless this it was and yet more their heed, as well as the free grace proclaimed, which roused the envy of the unhappy Jews. But even this premature introduction of the Gentiles though unfounded does not yield so strange and repulsive a meaning as that Paul and Barnabas (!) entreated that their discourse should be spoken on the next sabbath. That souls struck by the truth might beseech that 'these things', blessed yet so startling, so momentous yet solemn, should be spoken to them again, is very intelligible, as it is the unforced sense of the true text.

Tyndale completely missed the point of time intended, for he took εἰς τὸ μεταξὺ σάββατον of the intervening week — 'bitwene the Saboth dayes'. But this was from oversight of the later usage of μεταξὺ which signifies 'after', not 'between' only, as Kypke, Ott, and others have noticed with illustrations. Calvin was quite wrong therefore in censuring here the Vulgate and Erasmus who were

right; and still more is Beza to be blamed, because he was a better scholar than the great theologian he followed, and he ought to have known how thoroughly Josephus, Plutarch, and Clem., Rom. 44 (twice), justify the text of the Authorized Version against the marginal alternative. Dr. J. Lightfoot plainly confirmed it from his vast Rabbinical learning.

As verse 42 lets us know the general interest in what had been announced which prompted the desire to hear all again, so verse 43 adds that, on the break up of the congregation, many of the Jews and of the worshipping or devout proselytes followed the preachers thereon, who not only spoke to them but urged them to abide in the grace of God, which the gospel declares and they professed to receive. What can one think of a man like Calvin doubting whether it was not these young converts who exhorted Paul and Barnabas that they should not faint but stand firmly in the grace of God! He does not however (as Dean Alford thought) incline so strongly to this interpretation as to decide for it against the common and only correct view, that the gracious speech and confirmatory exhortation came from the apostles to those on whose hearts God's grace had just dawned

Again, in the beginning of verse 44 stands the expression on the 'coming' sabbath, vouched by both the most ancient uncials of highest character and the mass of cursives, and so not only adopted by Erasmus, the Complutensian, Colinaeus, R. Stephens, the Elzevirs, but also by Tischendorf {eighth edition), Tregelles, and by Westcott and Hort. On the other hand at least two of the great uncials with several good cursives testify to the exactly technical word which differs by a letter less, for 'next following', 'ensuing'. Acts 18: 21 used to be cited for the former, till the critics omitted the clause; but there is no doubt that the rival reading is a standing usage of the inspired writer (Luke 13: 33, Acts 20: 15; Acts 21: 26), as it is in the language generally. No wonder therefore that Alford, Bengel, Green Griesbach, Lachmann, Scholz, and Wordsworth accept it as right: an instructive instance, by no means uncommon, where a few copies are more accurate than the weight of both antiquity and number combined.

'But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted the things spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, For you it was necessary that the word of God should be first spoken; but since ye thrust it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn unto the Gentiles. For thus hath the Lord enjoined us, I have set thee for a light of Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the uttermost parts of the earth' (vers. 45-47).

How base as well as evil and malignant is jealousy, religious jealousy above all as here! In general they had hailed the joyful sound when it first reached their ears, even though closed with a most serious warning; and 'many' had gone farther than the entreaty to have the truth spoken again. For many of the Jews, as well as of the devout proselytes, followed the apostles who exhorted them to abide as they had begun. But 'the crowds' were too much for religious prejudice which was hitherto dormant and awakened the most malignant feelings in antipathy and abuse. Such is flesh in presence of grace and truth, and at the sight of hearts attracted and consciences touched. Had the gospel been powerless, the Jews had retained their equanimity, where the long preaching of Moses had never so wrought, its immediate effect in winning such large attention was intolerable. But the hatred of grace, ruinous to those guilty of it, only enlarges the field of work, as it also liberates the messengers from an overcareful waiting on the men of tradition and its narrow channels. Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, instead of being shocked into silence by Jewish blasphemies, pointed out how faith denies not but defers to law in its own place, and, now that the ancient people of God were ignorantly spurning the best blessings of grace, announced this matchless road open to the needy and long despised Gentiles (ver. 46).

The application of Isaiah 49: 6 in the following verse is as striking as richly instructive. The theme of the prophet is the Messiah rejected by Israel, Who has this consolation vouchsafed by God: His humiliation opens the door to wider glory. This the slighted servants of Christ appropriate to themselves. Infinite grace, under like circumstances, warrants the men of faith: what was said of Christ is no less true of the Christian. 'Thus hath the Lord enjoined us.' It is a principle of far-reaching application, which faith knows how to guard from irreverence, however much of direction, comfort, and strength may be reaped from it. The reader may see another instance no less bold in the use made of Isaiah 1. 7-9 in Rom. 8: 33, 34. The spirit of obedience, we may add, finds an injunction where no other eye could discern one.

Here first Gentiles as such come into prominence: others in this country who had heeded the apostles were proselytes from among them. Scripture was express as to the principle.

'And the Gentiles, on hearing, rejoiced and glorified the word of the Lord, and as many as were ordained unto life eternal believed. And the word of the Lord was carried abroad through the whole country. But the Jews excited the women of rank that worshipped, and the chiefs of the city, and stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and sent them out of their borders. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them and came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and [the] Holy Spirit' (vers. 48-52).

The tide of blessing in God's grace was now turned to the Gentiles. Christ is a light for revealing them now, as He is the glory of God's people Israel. The nations had been long hidden as well as outside; they are now disclosed to view, the direct object not of law as Israel once, but of divine mercy in the gospel. The righteousness of God is unto all, though it takes effect only upon all that believe. So here they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord, and as many as were ordained unto life eternal believed.

The evil and the ruin are man's: all the good is of God's grace exclusively, and the believer enjoys it in His sovereign mercy. Thus the word of the Lord was carried abroad through all the country. And this roused a more systematic effort of opposition as usual on the part of the Jews, who urged on the devout women of position and the chief men of the city against the apostles with such a flood of persecution as to cast them out of their borders. As these ladies had been drawn into Judaism to their immense relief from the uncleanness as well as debasing follies of heathenism, one can understand how the sex would be peculiarly open to exciting influence against the testimony which left the law in the shade and they would know how to reach the first men of the city, as being of their own rank and in all probability nearly connected with themselves, so as to get the preachers expelled. But the apostles, bowing to the persecution, acted on the Lord's word not only in fleeing to another city, but in shaking off the dust of their feet against their persecutors; while joy in the Holy Spirit filled the disciples, left behind as sheep in the midst of wolves.

Acts 14

If the Pisidian Antioch has only of late been identified, there is no doubt that Koniyyeh, a considerable town of some forty thousand souls, represents in our day Iconium, the changed scene of apostolic labours which now opens to us. It was then an important city, having rapidly grown up from Strabo's estimate in the reign of Augustus, as we may gather from Pliny's account, a few years later than the inspired one, though far below what it became as the capital of the Seljukian Sultans.

Here, as in the city just left, the Jews had a synagogue, to which Paul and Barnabas repaired as

usual. Persecution had in no wise daunted their courage or cooled their love and zeal in the gospel.

'And it came to pass in Iconium that they entered together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake that a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the Jews that disobeyed¹ stirred up the souls of the Gentiles and aggravated [them] against the brethren.² A considerable time therefore they stayed, speaking boldly in reliance on the Lord that gave witness unto the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided; and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when an effort was made of both the Gentiles and Jews with their rulers to outrage and stone them, becoming aware of it they fled unto the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the [country] round about, and there they were preaching the gospel' (vers. 1-7).

1 ELP and most cursives support the received ἀπειθοῦντες, but the older give ἀπειθήσαντες, a completed act.

2 DE, *et al*, add at the end of ver. 2, 'but the Lord gave (quickly) peace'. It has no stamp of truth. He was really pleased to give signs and wonders. It was needless here to speak of peace to the believer.

There was without doubt marked blessing at Iconium, where the Lord honoured and used largely the bold preaching of His grace: 'a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks believed.' This roused the enemy, and the Jews that disobeyed the glad tidings (cf. 2 Thess. 1: 8) stirred up the souls of the Gentiles and made them evil-affected against the brethren. It was not a visit from without but the alienation of the Jews that refused God's message on the spot, as is confirmed by the correct form of the word (ἀπειθήσαντες) in the more ancient witnesses as against the Received Text. But this only drew out a pretty long stay and plain speaking in dependence on the Lord, Who on His part displayed His gracious power not only in the more ordinary testimony to His word but in confirmatory signs and wonders, of which we heard nothing at Antioch in Pisidia. It is a solemn fact, however, that such deeds of divine energy, as the rule, do not turn the stubborn heart. Men judge mainly in accordance with their feelings, whatever be the qualms of conscience; and where the will is set on its own way, none so hardened as those that breathe a constant atmosphere of miracle, as we see in the wilderness history. So here in the face of all, the multitude of the city was rent in twain; and if some held with the apostles, others as decidedly held with the Jews, the hereditary enemies of the gospel, ever ingenious in perverting and undermining what might have told on upright minds.

But the intent of violence, which had oozed out, brought the testimony to a close: for a plan or start of this kind seems to be the force of what is meant here, rather than an 'assault', as may be inferred safely from the context. Had there been an actual 'rush', there seems little propriety in the words 'becoming aware of' what could not be doubted and made escape hard. Nor does the form of the verb admit of the rendering 'was making'; for the aorist must signify a definite fact instead of anything merely in course, which would be rather the imperfect. If they got cognisance of purpose to outrage and stone them so generally formed as to carry along Gentiles and Jews with their rulers, they judged it wise to leave with all haste. And so they fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the country around; and there they pursued their gospel work.

'And there sat a certain man at Lystra powerless in his feet,¹ lame from his mother's womb, who never had walked. This [man] heard Paul speaking, who, fastening his eyes upon him and seeing that he had faith to be made whole, said with a loud voice ² Rise upright on thy feet: and he leaped up and walked. And the crowds seeing what Paul did, lifted up their voices in Lycaonian, saying, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas Zeus, and Paul Hermes because

he took the lead in speaking. And the priest of the Zeus that was before the city, having brought bulls and garlands unto the gates, would have sacrificed with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard [of it], they rent their garments, and sprang out³ unto the crowd crying out and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like affections with you, preaching [or, evangelizing] to you that ye should turn from these vain things unto⁴ a living God Who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all things in them; Who in the bygone generations suffered all the Gentiles to walk in their own ways. And yet He left not Himself without witness in that He did good and gave you⁵ from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your⁵ hearts with food and gladness. And saying these things they with difficulty restrained the crowds from sacrificing to them. But there arrived Jews from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds and stoned Paul, they dragged [him] without the city, supposing that he was dead. But as the disciples encircled him, he rose up and entered into the city' (vers. 8-20).

1 'Being' HLP, *et al.* (Text. Rec.) but not in the most ancient. The aorist seems best for the last verb of the verse.

2 Lachmann follows CDE *et al.*, in adding, 'I say to thee, In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.'

3 The best MSS. 'out', not 'in' as in the Text. Rec. and most copies.

4 The definite article is probably to be omitted as in the best.

5 'You . . .', not 'us . . .' as in Text. Rec.

The healing of the hopelessly lame man was eminently suited to arrest a rude heathen crowd, besides its being a practical as well as extraordinary witness to the gracious character of God so foreign to the thoughts of man left to himself. All was in contrast with the mysterious mumblings with which their wizards practised their charms. The addition to verse 10 (see footnote) was made early to save the appearance of pretension on the part of him who wrought the miracle. The absence of the clause is the instructive lesson that as such words would be unavailing in another mouth (definitely proved long after at Ephesus), so they are by no means called for where all the life and testimony were set on magnifying Christ. There was no legally required formula. Of all men Paul was most conspicuously, as he loved to call himself, the 'bondman of Jesus Christ'; so that in his case it was the less necessary by a formal declaration to disclaim any virtue to heal by his own power or holiness.

That heathen should conclude as the Lycaonians did in consequence was the more natural, as they had the fabulous tradition made current a little while before by a Latin poet (Ovid) of the Augustan age that these very deities had been entertained in a part of Asia Minor. Physical differences would lead to the respective identification of their superstitious minds, besides the specific reason assigned in the case of Paul: and the proposal to do them sacrifice followed as matter of course. The scene is as usual set graphically before us; the crowd, the priest of Zeus (whose temple, or statue, was before the city), with the oxen and garlands all ready brought to the gates (of the house or court probably, where the apostles lodged). On the other hand we see the indignant and most earnest rejection of the God-dishonouring honour by Barnabas and Paul (for so they are presented in accordance with their assigned place), springing forth with garments rent and loud remonstrance. Their words were no less uncompromising though courteous. And what a difference from Romanist missionaries doing evil that good might come, or rather accepting a gross sin in order to propitiate their way, and to make a new and not less grievous and more guilty idolatry perpetual!

But the witnesses of the Lord Jesus are jealous for a living and true God and refuse to allow a sinful personal influence at His expense. 'Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like

affections with you, preaching to you that ye should turn from these vain things unto a living God. . . Substantially it was an appeal akin to what Paul afterwards uttered to the Athenians on the Areopagus. How debasing is heathenism! The ignorant Lycaonian and the refined Athenian needed the same sort of discourse. They are set to spell the alphabet of creation. Here, however, it is not so much the unity of God and man's true and near relationship to Him in contrast with his absurd reverence of idols or his god-making, it is God's active beneficence attested to the Lycaonians in rains and fruitful seasons, with their results in plenteous food and gladness.

That the gods are envious at human gladness was the lie and curse of paganism. Not such is He Who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them. Who could deny that in the generations bygone He suffered the nations to proceed in their own ways? If He sent the gospel now concerning His Son, was it not in full accordance with the active goodness He had testified to all lands and times in those bountiful gifts from heaven which overspread the otherwise barren earth with every good thing for man's life and heart? We need not dwell on each phrase; but it would not be hard to prove how telling was every word, and how all the undeniable truth thus conveyed indirectly dissipated the mischievous and destructive and demoralizing falsehoods of heathenism, to which their minds and habits had been inured, not only in their religion but in the whole of their outward relations saturated with that poison, as their own literary remains show and Rom. 1 briefly declares in the burning yet holy reproofs of its latter verses.

So inveterate is the idolatry of the heart that it was with difficulty the crowds were kept from sacrificing to the Lord's servants (ver. 18). How awful to think that Christendom over its largest part pays divine honours to men of like affections as themselves! It is admitted that apotheosis goes beyond canonization; but the dishonour to God and the injury to man can scarcely be said to be less. For the distinctive truth now is the unity, not of the Godhead only, but of the true Mediator; and consequently the peculiar assault of the enemy is not by honouring more gods than the living God, but by setting up other mediators or intercessors, as the Virgin, angels, and saints, no less than nullifying the full and intimate knowledge of God as the Father and the Son by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Here Romanism is the chief offender, though others are not free from the taint, as indeed the tendency is common to the natural man.

But idolatry was not the only danger at Lystra though others entered the scene characteristically to oppose, calumniate, and persecute. This is mostly the work of men who know some truth, but are jealous of more and better. These are the men who stifle conscience and are athirst for blood — blood of God's saints and Christ's servants, whom their ill-will blinds them to regard as the most wicked of men. So it was, and so it is. 'But Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium; and having persuaded the crowds and stoned Paul, they dragged him without the city, supposing that he was dead.' These adversaries were not wholly ignorant of God's testimony in the gospel. They knew enough to feel how immeasurably it rose above the law, and that it exceeded in glory was enough for their hard and proud hearts, which disdained to own their ruin, any more than God's righteousness which can and does justify the ungodly through the faith of Christ. To the law they adhered, because it was theirs rather than because it is God's, to the law, even though it can, as such, show no mercy to the guilty, and itself bears witness to the Messiah, the only Saviour of the lost. But to this witness they were wholly blind, being only alive to the pride of possessing it from God to the exclusion of all others. Yet when the gospel went out to others, they were eager to persuade these poor despised heathens that the word of God's grace which Paul preached was nothing but imposture. Alas! they found the crowds there, as ever since, ready victims. And why? That very refusal of homage, which the Lystrans were ready to pay, is most offensive to man, and disposes him to believe the most odious misrepresentations of those

he was about to worship. Men exalt themselves by human adoration, and to be balked of it soon turns to the hatred and perhaps death of those who seek the honour of the only God. So it was here. Instead of changing their minds like the Maltese (who from a murderer regarded Paul as a god, Acts 28: 6), they listen to Jewish calumny though ordinarily despised, and stone as a false prophet him to whom they had been so lately wishing to sacrifice, leaving him dragged without the city as a dead man.

But his life was in him, as he himself said later of Eutychus; and as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and entered into the city (ver. 20). Paul's work was only beginning, not done. To abide in the flesh was needful for many sinners as for all saints. It could not be that he was to expire thus, though Jews had incited Gentiles to do their worst, and imagined all was over. Grace had called him to its own great work of salvation, as well as of edifying the body of Christ. Nor was it enough that he rose up; he entered into the city, from which he had just been dragged outside as a corpse. Such was the faith and love of this more than martyr soul. Of him, if of any, we may surely say that the world was not worthy. Christ alone was and is the worthy One Paul could say, as he did, 'To me to live is Christ' — not the work only but Himself, of all things the most elevating, purifying, and strengthening of motives in that work. It is the spring of lowliness as of love, of courage as of faith. So rising up Paul entered into Lystra. Fear would have said, Go anywhere else just now. Self would have whispered, Stay there and see what a future triumph for the gospel! But the thoughts of man in neither suggestion are the mind of Christ, and this the apostle had, and acted upon. May it also be ours in His grace!

The apostle had now nearly reached the extreme point of this the first missionary journey.

'And on the morrow he went forth with Barnabas to Derbe.' This, or the country round about, was the farthest limit westward for the present. It might have seemed an inviting opportunity to have visited Cilicia or even Tarsus, but he that blamed John Mark, who left them and the work to return to Jerusalem, was not the man to allow such a claim; as even Barnabas seems to have done when he took Mark with him and subsequently went to Cyprus.

'And, ¹ after preaching the gospel to that city and making many disciples, they returned unto Lystra, and unto ¹ Iconium, and unto ¹ Antioch, establishing the souls of the disciples, exhorting [them] to continue in the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God' (vers. 21, 22). It was in this neighbourhood and during this visit apparently that Timothy was brought to the Lord through the apostle Paul (1 Tim. 1: 2; 2 Tim. 1: 2), for in Acts 16: 1 he is spoken of as already a disciple in Derbe and Lystra, well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Here no reference is made, though grace had great things in store for him. It was enough to add about Derbe that the preaching was blessed to many there as elsewhere.

¹ The best MSS. support εὐαγγελιζόμενοι, εἰς being repeated also.

We next hear of their return, visiting in reversed order Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. The circumstances gave a new character to the work. First, they were 'establishing the souls of the disciples'. For this is a necessary part of the labour of love, and a real need for new-born souls, and many who are blessed in awakening have little power to confirm the young disciples. Here were servants of the Lord fitted beyond all to help on the unestablished; and we are told of their exhorting them to abide in the faith. How much there is to alarm in it if not to seduce from it! But they are also warned of the difficulties in the way, especially of the numerous severe trials which intervene, or, as it is expressed, 'that through many tribulations we ¹ must enter into the kingdom of God.' So the Lord had told the early disciples who as Jews might and did expect things smooth and bright, now that the Messiah was come. But He was come to suffer and to go on high, rejected of men and of His earthly

people; which gives room to a yet deeper aggravation of the suffering path before glory dawn. And if Paul was a great preacher, not less was he a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. Christ was ever his theme; 'Whom we announce,' as he says himself, 'admonishing every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, to the end we may present every man perfect in Christ: whereunto also I labour, combating according to His working that worketh in me in power' (Col. 1: 28, 29). He never took any Christian duty lightly, least of all that which lies so near to God's purpose and Christ's affection, even for those who had not seen his face in the flesh: that their hearts might be encouraged, being united together in love and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the recognition of the mystery of God, in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2: 1-3). For those are not wanting anywhere, who, deceived themselves, seek to deceive the saints by persuasive speech. The word dwelling in us, and praise and prayer flowing out to God, with diligent testimony in love within as well as without, are grand safeguards; but withal the mind made up with joy for all endurance and long-suffering, as we wait for Christ and the kingdom.

1 There is no real ground for Dean Alford's notion that the 'we' here implies the presence of the narrator, but ὅτι marks the transition from the *oratio obliqua* to *oratio recta*.

Secondly, another task, which the first visit could not effect, still remained. 'And when they chose (or, appointed) for them elders in each assembly and prayed with fastings, they commended them to the Lord on Whom they had believed' (ver. 23). Naturally the differences in Christendom warp the minds of too many in their impressions of this instructive verse. Jerome, though by no means so extreme as some of the early fathers, interprets the word *χειροτονήσαντες*" (which all the early English Versions as well as the Authorized had rendered 'ordained', Tyndale, Cranmer, and Geneva adding 'by election') of ordination by laying on of hands, as if *χειροτονία* = *χειροθεσία*. This, Mr. Humphry rightly treats as untenable, or at least unsupported by any clear example of such a sense.

But we may go farther than Dean Alford, and must affirm that scripture nowhere points to the churches selecting elders by show of hands or in any other way. Indeed the phraseology before us excludes any such thought; for, first, if *χειροτονήσαντες* necessarily implied any such etymological import here, the meaning must be that Paul and Barnabas chose elders by the method of suffrage. This nobody holds or wishes, but the contrary. And, secondly, this is confirmed yet more abundantly by the pronoun 'for them', which excludes the disciples from their desired part in the election, and distinctly makes the apostles choose the elders for the saints concerned. Of all interpretations, therefore, none is so bad as the amiable compromise that the apostles ordained those whom each church elected. The words simply teach that Paul and Barnabas chose elders for the disciples in each assembly. No doubt the word may mean to stretch out the hand, and this especially in voting, but it had long been used, where no such form could be, to express choice or appointment. And this is certain in the New Testament without going outside it, and in Luke's *usus loquendi*, as the most prejudiced must allow in Acts 10: 41, and here too, unless he contends for Paul and Barnabas holding up their hands in each of these cases. This, however, is not what Congregationalism wants, but that *the disciples* should thus decide their choice of each elder and of one only in each church, whereas the text declares that the apostles chose elders *for them* in each assembly¹: the most distinct and conclusive disproof of popular election which language can convey. And if laying on of hands followed, it is in no way taught here, for the word refers only to the choice of the presbyters.

1 Dr. Bennett says that the more remote antecedent, 'the disciples', may be referred to, which is so certainly wrong that he himself immediately changes this by the suggestion that Luke may have designed to show what no doubt (?) was the fact (!), that the apostles concurred in their election, and held out their hands, along with the disciples (!) in favour of the elected elder.

Nor does 2 Cor. 8: 19 support the idea of an election of the elders popularly, for the question there was solely of brethren acceptable to the assemblies for conveying funds to the saints in distress elsewhere. And it is certain that scripture does warrant the saints at large in choosing those they confide in for such a work, as we see in Acts 6. Still less is there the slightest analogy with the two put forward (not elected) in Acts 1: 23, as to whom they prayed the Lord to choose for the vacant apostolate. The lot is a wholly different principle, on which turned the numbering or enrolment of Matthias with the eleven. In short, the procedure here was, just what Calvin denies, the apostles choosing solely in virtue of their peculiar office, as afterwards Titus was commissioned by Paul to appoint the elders in every city of Crete, without a hint of sitting as moderator of a free election by the consent of all. Not only is this Book thus in harmony, but the New Testament as a whole. Where man gave, man was allowed to choose where the Lord gave, He chooses and sends apart from man; where it is a question of order, the authorized envoys of the Lord appointed in His name, not only directly as here, but indirectly through a distinctly recognized channel as elsewhere.

After the choice of elders for the saints, the apostles prayed with fasting and commended them to the Lord on Whom they had believed. The saints in general were the object in view, not the elders only. And whatever the supplication which assuredly preceded and accompanied the delicate work of appointing the elders, it would appear from the language and connection that the prayers and fasting here specified followed that appointment and concerned the saints cast on the sustaining grace of the Lord.

'And having passed through Pisidia they came unto Pamphylia; and having spoken the word [of the Lord]¹ in Perga they went down unto Attalia; and thence they sailed unto Antioch, whence they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they arrived and brought the assembly together, they repeated all things God had wrought with them, and how He had opened to the Gentiles a door of faith. And they tarried² no little time with the disciples' (vers. 24-28).

¹ Tischendorf on small but ancient authority gives 'unto Perga'. Rather more of similar character add 'of the Lord', or 'of God'.

² The more ancient authorities do not give 'there'.

Thus the first great evangelistic journey to the heathen by the apostles was brought to a close, Perga having heard the word on their return, if not on the earlier occasion saddened by the departure thence of John. And now Attalia (the modern Satalia, or Adalias) was touched, instead of Paphos, or any other part of Cyprus; and from that port to the Syrian Antioch, their point of departure, the voyage was readily made.

To the remarks already made it is of moment to add a few words more which may help souls. The latter part of verse 26 defines yet more, if it were needed, the import of that which had preceded this missionary visit. It was in no true sense an 'ordination' of Barnabas and Paul, but, as here described, it was their recommendation to the grace of God for the work which they had fulfilled. Indeed from Acts 15: 40 it would seem to have been repeated on the apostle's second journey with Silas. The notion of holy orders founded on the beginning of Acts 13 is therefore not only false and alien, but it strips what was done of all its gracious meaning. It is part of that judaizing which for most has darkened New Testament scripture, and debased the true grace of ministry.

Next, we may observe that, though sent out authoritatively by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13: 4) and thus placed directly under responsibility to the Lord Whose bondmen they were, they were quick to share all His doings with the saints: they call together the assembly whence they had gone out that all

might rejoice in His grace, and especially in His grace to the Gentiles. The church is not the source of mission, but the scene of communion with divine grace using the truth for the blessing of the Gentiles by Paul (not Peter), and from Antioch as a starting-point on earth (not Jerusalem nor yet Rome). Patriarchal jurisdiction there was none, till men forgot that the true spring of the authority, power, and blessing was Christ in heaven, and ere long they began to dream of rival sees and their hierarchs. How soon did the little seed become a tree, so that the birds of heaven, which snatch away what was sown in the heart, came and lodged in its branches (Matt. 13: 31, 32)!

We should bear in mind that the stay of Paul and Barnabas on their return to Antioch was not short.