

The Apostle at Athens

With appeals to Souls now.

W. Kelly

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PAUL AT ATHENS.

Acts 17: 16, 17.

The apostle had fared no better in Europe than in Asia. He was persecuted and evil-entreated in Philippi, and had to flee for his life from Thessalonica and Berea. Now he was alone in Athens, waiting for Silas and Timothy. He found no pleasure in the mother of arts, and eloquence, and philosophy. Its beauty of sculpture and statuary, its splendour of architecture, was contaminated with idolatry. As was said by a satirist, it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens; so that his spirit was stirred to its

depths within him, as he beheld the city full of idols. What a sight for him who in his unrenewed days was brought up in another city which boasted that not one idol defiled it!

For Paul such boasting was now vain. He had learnt from God, and learnt it for his own soul, that there is none righteous, no, not one; none that understands, none that seeks after God. Such is God's sentence even on those under law (for there was no question of Gentile evil); that every mouth may be stopped and all the world be under judgment to God. In short, there is no difference as to ruin; for all sinned, and fall short of the glory of God, as he himself said by inspiration at a later day.

But the love of Christ constrained the lonely saint. The eye and altar of Greece had not a single charm for his single eye and devoted heart. What to him was the far-famed Acropolis with the gigantic statue of the tutelary goddess Pallas Athene, helmet, shield and spear gleaming in the sunlight? What the Areopagus with its dark sanctuary of the Eumenides? What the still striking temple of Theseus? What every public building, every available place, with altars dedicated to deities of besotted mankind, yea, abstractions not merely of an elevated sound, but down to Insolence and Impudence, a religious cover for all lusts, depravities, dishonours and dishonesties? They were nothing but horrors to his spirit; for they simply displayed a people that gloried in slavery to Satan, in religion so false and base as to consecrate the most shameless dissoluteness, and in the most senseless ignorance of the only true God.

Instead of being stunned by such profound iniquity and darkness, isolated as he was and valuing fellowship beyond any known to us, he looked to his Master as a faithful servant; and with unflinching courage he dared to testify Him Who, being light and love, demonstrated it by sending His Son to make Him known to Jew and Gentile. That very city compelled one of its most enquiring citizens to drink a cup of poison for teaching the duty of heeding the monitor which God has lodged in fallen man. It was what we more rightly call conscience, but regarded by him as a sort of divinity. But on his own showing it only warned him at best against wrong, had never communicated any positive good, and evidently failed to apprise him of the folly of having a cock sacrificed to Aesculapius on his death.

Undeterred by such a fate, the apostle was led to throw himself heart and soul to make known the truth. "So he kept reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout, and in the market-place with those he met with." Alas! the ancient people of God needed the gospel, no less than the Pagans. They owned one living God: a great and blessed truth, where it has also living power. But rejecting their own Messiah, even to the death of the cross, they were now the open and extreme enemies of God and His Son. The only hope therefore, for them, "the rebellious" as their own scripture calls them, lay in confessing their fatally unbelieving error at His feet, Who suffered for sins that He might bring them to God, whiter than snow by His precious blood; for no less than this does His word assure.

Equally is the Lord Jesus the Saviour of the Gentile through faith in God's testimony to His Son. Such is the gospel, the glad tidings, of God. And we learn from the few and plain words of the inspired historian how assiduously the apostle gave himself up to the work of publishing it, the most gracious message God ever sent to sinful guilty man. If diligent in the synagogue on the sabbath, he discoursed in the agora, or marketplace, every day to those he met: deep their need, burning his zeal. The cross of Christ proved that the Jew was no better in heart than the heathen, nay, that he was worse because he turned his greater privileges to pride, and after a deadlier sort hated Messiah and God Who sent Him.

But what and where are you who read these lines? Have you profited by the darkness of the Gentile and the downfall of Israel to judge your own self? Is not all your life fitting you only for judgment and the lake of fire? Or are you setting up the wretched plea that all the world has gone wrong, and that you are no blacker than others? Will this be the smallest comfort to you in the endless punishment of hell? O the folly and the madness of turning away from Him Who speaks to you in the

gospel, as He did through His bondman alike to the idolatrous Athenians, and to the Jews, with such Gentiles as found their way to the synagogue to hear the Law and the Prophets, awakened to discern the abominations of heathenism, however adorned by poetry or the fine arts.

You have privileges still greater than the Jew. You have been brought up where the New Testament is accepted as God's word, no less than the Old. You have in a general way heard of the Son of God come as the Saviour of sinners. You have read that God sent Him that, believing on Him, you may have life eternal and everlasting redemption, without money and without price. How reckless then to go on impenitent and unbelieving! Sinners are perishing every moment: is this no warning to you no less a sinner than they?

Another apostle warns of idols still more engrossing and prevalent than those which shocked Paul at Athens. Invisible though they be, they govern the heart, and will quite as much as, or more than, those of gold, silver, or stone, graven by man's art and imagination. What are ease, pleasure, power, honour to all sorts and conditions of men, high or low? What is Mammon but the basest of false gods? Riches, more eagerly worshipped by man universally than any one or all idols together of the heathen world, as the means of gratifying every other passion and desire? Forget not the Lord's solemn word, "*Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.*" Who can deliver you from this innate evil but the same One Whom God raised from among the dead, Jesus the Deliverer from the wrath to come? He is equally the Deliverer from present sins and lusts to serve a living and true God, and to await Himself from the heavens.

O sinner, delay not but hear Him now speaking in His word to you personally, that the salvation of God may be yours by faith, now for your soul, then for your body at His coming again.

THE PHILOSOPHERS, EPICUREAN AND STOIC.

ACTS 17: 18.

A new adversary of the gospel encountered the apostle at Athens. It was not, as at Philippi, the insidious effort of Satan through the spirit of Python, which essayed to flatter or patronise the servants of the Most High, but was spurned and cast out with holy indignation, whatever might be the enmity of disappointed selfishness and the world's persecution. Nor was it, as at Thessalonica, the old and ever active jealousy of Jewish unbelief, which took advantage of Paul's preaching the Lord's kingdom to accuse of rebellion against Caesar. At Athens philosophers now figure for the first time, never suspending their baneful influence till its career is closed in the coming apostasy. For philosophy occupies itself with phenomena, never rises above second causes, and will not bow to God's authority revealing Himself in the written word, still less in the personal Word. It is but man's mind, without real activity of conscience or the truth.

"But some also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers assailed him. And some said, What would this chatterer say? and others, He seemeth to be an announcer of strange demons, because he preached [or evangelised] Jesus and the resurrection."

We do not hear of the Academicians or of the Peripatetics. The schools that followed Plato and Aristotle respectively lay in the north-west and in the north-east of the suburbs. But those of Epicurus and of Zeno adjoined the marketplace, where they crossed the apostle's path, and heard words of grace and truth, not only altogether new to their ears, but wholly subversive of their systems. And their systems did not emulate the idealism of Plato, nor the comprehensive earthly knowledge which was the

boast of Aristotle. The Epicureans and the Stoics occupied themselves far more than the others with man's actual life of every day, opposed flatly to each other, but both utterly and directly to God's revelation of Himself in Christ.

With these the gospel preached by his ambassador came into open collision: first, Jesus in person; secondly, the resurrection. But philosophers, with all their speculative activity and lofty soarings above the vulgar, are ever apt as here to show themselves the dullest of mankind in the things of God. The Jews, spite of intense prejudice and envious hostility to a new revelation, never manifested such stupidity as this case betrayed; nor did the gross and half-barbarous Lycaonians or other heathen denizens of Asia Minor. These philosophers seem to have conceived that Paul set forth Jesus and the resurrection, as two divinities, male and female, a division of the gods common to perhaps all forms of idolatry except Tsabaism.

The Epicureans were materialists and practically if not professedly Atheists, though they admitted the existence of gods taking no notice of any one. The Stoics were Pantheists, and equally excluded one true and living God with Whom every soul must have to do, but held a soul of the world as god. Chrysippus rather than Zeno of Citium formulated this school, which also held the soul to be a body and perishable; but the Soul of all things, of which the souls of animals are part, imperishable. Both denied creation; both fancied matter to be eternal. Divine judgment was equally set aside, sense of sin before God, and relationship with Him, on which really depends all moral duty. Chance, according to the Epicureans, characterises the world; Fate, according to the Stoics: the one as easy-going, as the other was severe, issuing in pleasure for the former, and pride for the latter.

How completely was this learned ignorance exposed as corrupt imagination, and condemned by the glad tidings of God! When sin entered to the ruin of our first parent, He then pointed out in a rather mysterious way (till the fact explained in all simplicity) the woman's Seed Who was to crush the serpent, Satan, and deliver such as looked to Himself in faith and repentance. He had marked out the Blessor, as the Seed of Abraham and, yet more restrictedly, of David. He had later still shut up the Saviour even more narrowly to the Son of "the Virgin" of David's house, thus clearing, seven centuries before, the unique personality of Him, Who should be truly Immanuel, God with us yet man. "Jesus" alone centres all this and more in Himself, Who was to give His life a ransom for many; Jesus, that cured the sick and raised the dead, yet hated and slain by those to whom He did nothing but good; Jesus, Who thus proved man's enmity to God, and God's love unbounded to man. For in truth by that sacrifice alone could those who believe be forgiven, receive life eternal, and be cleansed from every sin.

God had from of old testified all this by the law and the prophets. But He had recently crowned His old and written word by the new and stupendous fact, which the Lord had openly and repeatedly attested by His lips, in His resurrection from the dead. Him whom man killed God raised up again, as He in due time received Him up in glory. How blessed the tidings for all that believe! How awful the guilt of those who cleave to empty philosophy, Epicurean, Stoic, or any other!

For those it is the indifference of man, insensible of his sins, and blind to the true God Who so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son that the believer might not perish but have life eternal. For these it is the haughty self-sufficiency which admires itself, spouts about virtue, and scorns to own the sins, and to receive a Saviour from God in Jesus. Yet He meekly bore the shame of the cross at man's hand, and God's judgment of our evil, that He might save one from his sins: alike God's grace, and His new justifying righteousness, to which His resurrection of Christ affixed a divine seal.

And now, my reader, be assured there is no other Saviour for you, or any other. You may be

unlearned or a philosopher. But sin levels all to the dust of death. O through Jesus believe in God that raised Him from among the dead and gave Him glory, that your faith and hope may be in God. There is no other way to God. As God is one, so there is but one Mediator, the man Christ Jesus Who gave Himself a ransom for all. Now God's testimony claims your faith. To the believer only is the blessing. How could it be for those who do not repent of their sins, nor receive God's glad tidings? O doubt not, delay not, but believe His word that abides for ever!

"THIS NEW DOCTRINE"

ACTS 17: 19-21.

The more familiar one may have been with the demoralising vanities of Greek mythology, the less one can wonder at the surprise which greeted the apostle's words in the market-place of Athens. If some were contemptuous, others were curious. Mental activity works all the more freely where conscience slumbers, and the soul is not purified by obeying the truth to unfeigned love. As political importance too had long vanished thence, quips and quiddities were their resource to fill the vacuum. "And having laid hold of him they brought him unto the Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would therefore know what these things may mean. (Now all Athenians and the strangers sojourning there spent their time in nothing else than either to tell or to hear last news)."

Though there was and had been for some time a remarkable scarcity of brilliant men in Athens, they had, as they boasted, a rich inheritance of the beautiful in art, of exercised and daring thought in philosophy, of finished elegance in poetry, eloquence, and history, along with utter corruption and unnatural depravity in morals, and their gods the magnified image of their own degradation. At that time appeared Jesus the Son of God, the woman's Seed. In Him shone the light of God, and the love of God. To announce Him was indeed new teaching. He, and He only, was the perfect image of the invisible God. "He was in the world, and the world was made [brought into being] by Him, and the world knew Him not." How besotted was the world! how vain, useless, blinding was its wisdom! The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib. But the world in its highest civilisation knew not its own Creator. And no wonder. It had long stumbled on in the darkness of evil and of gods that were only demons.

But the Jews? They were no better; they were even guiltier. "He came to His own things, and His own people received Him not." They had the law and the prophets, and John the Baptist to prepare His way. But their will was engaged against Him. They would have relished a Messiah to put down the Romans and to set Israel at the head of all the nations. This will be when He comes again in power and glory. But He with God made it the first work to save sinners. What would be the worth of His kingdom if sin were not first atoned for? A lowly, gracious, holy, and suffering Messiah was hateful to their proud hearts, because He was infinitely better and higher than they had conceived, and they themselves immeasurably worse.

Philosophy had never found out that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." It never learnt even that when man was made, he and every thing around him were "very good;" still less that he is fallen under sin, and the creature subjected to man, like man, under the power of death. It was to meet this state of sin and ruin that, when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under law, that He might redeem those under law, that we might receive sonship.

What had this to do with science unable to rise above causes and effects? and, when pursued to its utmost height, finding only a blank wall which it cannot pass? So acknowledged one of earth's sages just departed. Science cannot get beyond phenomena, and the general laws deduced from them. Science is but the classification of what exists and the discovery of what the philosophers are pleased to call nature's "laws." But Who produced the phenomena and imposed those laws? There it is blind and dumb; and the utmost it confesses is the existence of primordial facts or causes, of which it can give no account. And why not? Because they point to the First Cause, the Uncaused One, Who is the cause of all secondary causes. But this men refuse, and prefer to remain Agnostics, strange stronghold of the pride of knowledge. "The world [not by folly only, but also] by wisdom knew not God."

Yea, there was the awful sight of man with all his pride bowing down to his own handiwork, idols of metal or stone, in blank ignorance of the true and living God Who had sent His Son to die for sinners and rescue all who believe from the present evil age. Is He the only potentate, the alone Good, King of kings and Lord of lords, Who must not punish rebellion? And is it not plain and deadly rebellion against Him to worship, as they were doing, false gods? and gods so vile!

But He is love; and He has proved it by sending His Son to become man (while always God), that He might suffer for sins, and thus save all sinners that submit to Him. To the acceptance of this, the only efficacious sacrifice, God has borne witness by raising the crucified Saviour from the dead. Hear it, ye who are under the spell of haughty scientists. The risen Jesus testifies to His Father's glory, and to the love He is showing even to His worst enemies that repent. If His own birth of the virgin is wholly above the sphere of causes and effects, much more His resurrection proclaims that God acts in that power equal to His love, and righteously interposes to save all that believe. Not even a philosopher could argue that death is the cause of resurrection. No, it is *God* that raises the dead; and He it is Who in the gospel announces these glad tidings that you may believe, and, though a lost sinner, be saved by His grace.

Yes, the gospel is "new doctrine;" and the truth of God is of all things strangest to fallen man — stranger far than fiction.

AN "UNKNOWN GOD."

ACTS 17: 22, 23,

In the vast throng of strange gods at Athens the discerning eye of the apostle observed an altar with an inscription which unconsciously acknowledged the ruined estate, not only of its inhabitants, but of all the heathen world. Not that they thereby intended a humbling admission; yet the words told the fact to him who knew the truth. It appears from adequate witnesses that there were several altars thus inscribed. Paul certainly saw one, and spoke accordingly. In their grossly polytheistic zeal they devoted shrines, not only to all home and foreign deities, but to unknown gods, that not one should miss due honour. This furnished Paul with his plea; and how immeasurably superior to the Apology of Socrates is the appeal of the "apostle of nations!"

"And Paul stood amidst the Areopagus and said, Men of Athens, in all things I behold you more [than others] in awe of divinities (demons). For coming through and beholding your objects of worship, I found also an altar on which had been inscribed, TO AN (or, THE) UNKNOWN GOD. What therefore ye reverence without knowing, this I announce to you."

Grace with single eye laid hold of what was true, to reach conscience and judge the false. No

introducer of strange divinities was the apostle, but made known the God whom this altar openly acknowledged to be "unknown." Which of them could deny that the gods of Olympus, the most honoured in their midst, were by their own account the most arbitrary, corrupt, and violent personages within their ken, and afforded to their devotees a basis not of morality but of the vilest and even unnatural indecency? And if this was the religion of the multitude, kept up by sacerdotal selfishness and sanctioned for state-craft by politicians, what had proud or sceptical philosophers done? Nothing but aggravate the evil by vain efforts to reconcile a world of sin, sorrow, and death with a feeble god, with gods unavailing or indifferent, who left it for guilty presumptuous men to make progress and improve things here below.

For not one of their divinities claimed to be eternal, omniscient, and omnipotent in self-being. Not one of them said, I AM, or was ever said to be Light morally, or Love in the energy of his nature. Yet there is in every human being, unless he be drunk with superstition or fatally poisoned by scepticism, what has been called God-consciousness, and is forced to own, that God there must be. And though no one could by searching find out His nature; yet when presented to man by revelation, his conscience owns that these attributes and this nature are alone worthy of Him.

What then makes the insurmountable difficulty? That little word, but awful, personal, and universal reality, SIN. Yet it alone accounts for the ruin, the confusion, the darkness, the uncertainty, and the misery for man everywhere. And what is it for a good, and holy, and righteous God? Bible or no Bible, a world wicked and wretched is a fact before all. But it is a notion worthy of the arch-enemy that the eternal God made it as it is; it negatives all just thought of His goodness, wisdom, and power. That it fell into its actual condition through the transgression of its head is the sole reasonable key, as the Bible distinctly declares it to have been the simple fact. Idolatry and philosophy only added to the mischief by denying the good state which a faithful Creator made to hinge on the obedience of the first man. For man was constituted and tried as a moral being. But they do still worse; they lead men to disbelieve in the Second man, Who being God came in the light and love of God to save all who believe on Him; and Who, also becoming man, died as the one efficacious sacrifice for the sins, and rose for the justification, of those who repent and believe the glad tidings. O how worthy of God and His Son!

Man from the first departed from God, Who left him to feel his exile from the paradise of Adam, though not without both sentence of judgment and a revelation of a suffering Deliverer, the woman's Seed. But the race willingly, contentedly, did without His presence and favour, save a few men of faith; and the rest gave themselves up to corruption and violence, till He intervened by the deluge which swept them all away. Only Noah and his sons, and their wives, with animals clean and unclean, were saved in the ark; and the present age began. But it was soon marked not only by fresh institutions of God, but by a new evil. As the apostle tells us, "Knowing God, they glorified him not as God, nor were thankful; but fell into folly in their thoughts, and their unintelligent heart was hardened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds and quadrupeds and reptiles. Wherefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness." It is his holy account of paganism, and of its utter absence of truth, piety, and moral decency.

Such was Athens, with an unknown God. Such were heathen men who through faith of Christ turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God made known to them in His Son, the risen Saviour. Believing on Him, it was not pardon only they received, but life eternal: the basis of a new nature and walk, seen and made known by chosen and inspired witnesses. Some were as dark and dissolute as any in Athens or Corinth, to whom the apostle wrote after they believed, "But ye were

washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified." How was this wondrous change? In virtue of what? "In the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

Thus is God known in His Son and by His Spirit, as scripture abundantly testifies. Take our Lord's few words in John 17: 3: "This is life eternal, to know thee [the Father] the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou didst send." O turn not away from such grace and truth, but "believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house."

THE GOD THAT MADE THE WORLD.

ACTS 17: 24.

Creation is a great truth, which unbelief never recognised. It seems not to have been denied among men before the Deluge, though of no value or effect because of their growingly vile condition. Scripture implies that idolatry sprung up after that solemn judgment of God. They were without excuse; because the things that are made, the very reverse of a development, pointed to the invisible, His everlasting power and divinity; and also because when they knew God externally and without dispute, they glorified Him not as God, and were not thankful. Such guilty indifference led them into folly which their darkened heart accounted wisdom; so that they exchanged the truth of God for the lie of the great enemy, and honoured and served the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed for ever. Amen. The shameful lusts before became shameless afterwards; and no sadder proof could be asked than Athens then presented to a godly and discerning eye. They even gloried in their shame.

With admirably delicate tact the apostle, in making known an unknown God, begins with the miracle whose effect is before all eyes, in spite of the disorder everywhere through the fall. Instead of being an announcer of strange demons, he was the first, at their own invitation to the Areopagus, to assert gravely, graciously, and with all plainness of speech the rights of the one true God. When they themselves sought or at least asked to know what this new doctrine meant, how little they expected such a simple and noble testimony carrying its own self-evidencing power to every unbiased conscience!

"The God that made the world and all things that are in it, he being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made by hands." Every clause, every word one might say, undermined paganism without a syllable justly to offend. The grand yet elementary truth left no room for the myths of priests and poets, or for the reasonings of sages in pitch darkness. The remarkable fact is that none of the jarring leaders of religion or philosophy claimed for their gods, home or foreign or unknown, to have made the world and all things that are therein. They attributed that wonderful work neither to any one approaching supremacy, nor to all working together in respective spheres to that common end. So far they unwittingly told the truth. The demons had nothing to do with making the world, or any one of the things that are in it. The true God whom they knew not made them all.

They had their varied dreams. But their schemes as to the origin of all around and above and beneath, their cosmogonies, so called, are but one speculation more absurd than another. The only rare resemblance to the facts is found in whatever bit of early tradition they might adopt which lingered in men prone to forget. The prevalent idea of the philosophers is eternal matter. So pantheism ruled for ages in India, whence it spread south and west, more and more, as it grows now in Europe and America. Brahm or God had no personality, and hence no creation could be, but the Darwinian development idol. The wretched details of emanation which made polytheism a necessary result are not

worth refuting or repeating.

What a contrast are those dark and foul vapours with the clear light of scripture and creation, brief yet adequate before man, with ample and interesting and all-important accounts when the earth was formed, and he was ushered into a scene which was equally suited to prove God's beneficence and to furnish the proper sphere for man's responsibility. The apostle here states, without controversy, the fact which delivered from human dreams derogatory to the truth.

Nor is the God that made all only a Creator. He is Lord of heaven and earth. His authority is constant everywhere. Fallen man writhes under this truth, because it at once appeals to conscience. As a man, I am His creature, and by that tie necessarily His servant. Am I doing His will? Am I pleasing Him as the motive of my life? But now I am a fallen man, departed from Him, and I like to do my own will, though knowing it is opposed to His. But if He is Lord of heaven and earth, He must call me to account for my misdoing; and what and where must be my portion, especially if I go as I am? He could not be the good and holy and righteous, as He must be as the true God, if He were indifferent to His own honour, and to His creature's dishonour, habitual too as it is.

He does "not dwell in temples made with hands." So implied the prophet Isaiah to those who rested on that boon in their midst, soon to fall. So Stephen precisely said; and Paul who then heard with unbelieving ears now proclaimed it in faith and love to the Athenians more devoted than any on earth to that show in honour of the demons that consecrated every vile lust. Will the Lord of heaven and earth endure or pass by such iniquity? Will He not execute judgment not only on the demons but on their votaries because of their rebellion against Himself?

Therefore it was that the apostle had preached Jesus and the resurrection in the busy haunts of men, before they hied to the Areopagus. Therefore it was that God was sending to all mankind the glad tidings of a dead and risen Saviour. The God that made the universe, the Lord of heaven and earth, Who dwells not in temples made with hands, deigns to look on one that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembling at His word. His goodness leads the sinner to repentance; and where shone His goodness as in Jesus? It was this that attracted the woman that was a sinner; it was this that won the hard robber to penitence and faith on the cross; it was this that overwhelmed Paul the crusader of law into the most lowly saint and sufferer for Himself.

This is the One that is now announced to you. If you, who have no righteousness fit for God, have not yet submitted to the righteousness of God in Christ, your need, your danger, is as real as that of the Athenians. O look to Jesus, the life, the life eternal, that you may live to God now and ever more. The gospel is not only remission of sins to every one that believes, but life through Christ's name. He that suffered for the sins of every believer is the giver of life eternal now, and will raise him up at the last day.

THE SELF-SUFFICING GIVER OF ALL THINGS TO ALL.

"Nor is he served by human hands as needing something, himself giving to all life and breath and all things.

— Acts 17: 25.

The God unknown at Athens, as everywhere else among the nations, the apostle first made known, as the maker of the world and of all things therein. Even this man soon gave up. He heeded not

the evidence of His everlasting power and divinity in the world of creation. He forgot the traditional knowledge which all had at first, weary of glorifying Him, and unthankful for His mercies. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into nature worship, and next into deified humanity if we so may call the chief object of their adoration invested with sex and the like human properties. The multiplicity of religions attested the loss of the one true God: no splendour of image or of temples could hide but only publish the imposture. How circumscribe the Omnipresent Lord of heaven and earth within man's work?

Next in verse 25 witness is borne not to His creative majesty alone but to His goodness. "Nor is he served by human hands as needing something, himself giving to all life and breath and all things." In these respects too God was an unknown God to the heathen world. They thought Him morally such a one as themselves. Their conviction was that the gods had no pleasure in man's happiness, but rather in casting down the exalted and reversing the prosperous. Thus none was to be called blessed till his life came unscathed to an end.

The apostle set before the Athenians One who, good in Himself, does good actively, even in the world out of course as it is now, since man's fall brought in sin and death universally. Yet He who needs nothing for Himself makes His sun rise on evil and good, and sends rain on just and unjust. Nor has He left Himself without witness in doing good, and giving from heaven fruitful seasons, and filling hearts with food and gladness. So it was among all the nations whom in times past He suffered to go in their own ways of ignoring Him: He gives to all life and breath and all things. How simple and self-evidencing the plain fact to make known the God whom confessedly they knew not! What a contrast with all the false gods (the real demons) of the world who debased their devotees to their own rebellious evil and mischievous selfishness, enabling also their priests to prey on the guilty fears of mankind.

The true God gives to all life and breath and all things. Even in a ruined world this active beneficence went out impartially. He makes the grass grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man, to bring forth bread out of the earth, and wine that gladdens man's heart, making his face shine — shine more than with oil; and with bread he strengthens man's heart. He makes darkness, and it is night, wherein all the beasts of the forest creep forth, the young lions roaring for their prey, and to seek their food from God. The sun rises: they retreat, and lay them down in their dens. Man goes forth to his work and to his labour till the evening. How manifold are Thy works, O Jehovah; in wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth is full of Thy riches. They all look to Thee, that Thou mayest give them food in its season; Thou givest them, they gather; Thou openest Thy hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest Thy face, they are troubled; Thou takest away their breath, they expire and return to their dust. What a comment is Psalm 104 on God's sustaining goodness!

Yet Athens had little ear to hear though the truth carried its proof to every unbiased ear. The apostle was cut short on Areopagus. The pleasures of sin monopolised his hearers in general. God's judgment was an intolerable idea. Let us eat and drink, talk and laugh; for to-morrow we die. But God is not mocked. Nor is man a mere animal with higher mental capacity than the brute, but made in God's image, after His likeness. The Judge of all "formed" him alone of earth's denizens, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, man only having his soul in immediate association with Him as His moral governor, and in direct responsibility to Him in his peculiar nature and place. Whatever men shamelessly speculate, no beast has a conscience toward God, as man has, drug or deny it as he may. Hence infinite compassion flowed to man in his sin and ruin.

He who was God but became man, the woman's Seed, deigned to be the unparalleled gift of

divine love, that lost man might believe and be saved. For God so loved the world that He gave His only- begotten Son, that whoever believes on Him shall have life eternal. For God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes on Him becomes a child and a son of God; and if so, he receives the gift of the Spirit, the Spirit of adoption, crying Abba, Father.

No doubt that the new relationship creates fresh wants. But God is ever the same bounteous giver; and if He be for us, who against us? He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him grant us all things? Who shall lay charge against God's elect? It is God that justifies: who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yea but rather that was raised up, who is also at God's right hand, who also intercedes for us: who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? According as it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we were reckoned as sheep for slaughter. But in all these things we more than conquer through Him that loved us. Truly every good gift, and every perfect giving, comes down from above, from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation or shadow of turning.

Why then should you, my reader, if you have never yet believed, die in your sins? Why longer yield to the destruction and bondage and lie of Satan against the Saviour God? The truth alone can and will set you free. Behold and believe on the Son; He shall set you free, and you too be truly free.

EVERY NATION FROM ONE SOURCE, AND UNDER GOD'S CONTROL.

"And of one [blood] he made every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having defined ordained seasons and the bounds of their dwelling."

Acts 17: 26.

The apostle next adverted to the providential arrangement for man as he is over the earth. If men departed from God so as not to know Him, as they assuredly desired not the knowledge of His ways, it might have been thought that the origin of nations was not utterly forgotten. But man readily lets slip what humbles him, as he accepts or invents the fable of moral progress, because it humours his vanity. Nor was any part of the race more inflated with self- satisfaction than the Greeks who then heard of the true God, not only in His creative and sustaining goodness, but in His forming those communities called "nations."

After the deluge, sent judicially to sweep away a generation corrupt and filled with violence, sacrifice was made the ground on which the world that now is was set. The principle of government too was introduced; "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Flesh, not the herb only, was now free for his food, but not the blood, reserved for God to whom life belongs.

But the renewed earth saw man renewing his iniquities. Even Noah the governor failed to govern himself, and disappeared from further notice, as Adam after the fall. As men journeyed from the east they found a plain in the land of Shinar where they decided to dwell, instead of replenishing the earth as they had been enjoined. Their device was to centralise by erecting a city and a tower, and make themselves a name, for God was in none of their thoughts, lest they should be scattered. Union was strength; and they would be independent. But Jehovah scattered them abroad by the new, simple, and effective means of confounding their mutual communications by differing tongues; for hitherto the

whole earth was of one lip and of one speech.

Thus, instead of a vast commonwealth of all mankind, the divine Governor brought about man's dispersion first, and at length in Peleg's day the division of the earth. Whatever might come by migration or resolution, the nations after their families and tongues occupied their lands to the apostle's day and to ours. God is not mocked.

"And of one [blood] he made every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having defined ordained seasons and the bounds of their dwelling."

So the prophets from Moses to Malachi, confirmed by the New Testament, declare that the King of kings and Lord of lords at His coming in power and glory will judge them *as nations* in their respective measures before the eternal judgment, not only the dead works individually, but the secrets of darkness and the counsels of hearts. Compare for the former Deut. 32: 41-43, Deut. 33: 26-29; Ps. 2: 5, 9-12, Ps. 9: 8, 9, 15-20, Ps. 10: 16-18, Ps. 45: 4, 5, Ps. 48: 4-7, Ps. 76: 10-12, Ps. 110: 2, 5, 6, Ps. 149: 6-9 ; Isa. 2: 10-22, Isa. 13: 6, 11, Isa. 14: 26, Isa. 17: 12-14, Isa. 24: 1, 21-23, Isa. 26: 9-11, Isa. 29: 5-7, Isa. 34, Isa. 63: 1-6, Isa. 66: 15-16 ; Jer. 25: 30-33 ; Ezek. 38, 39; Dan. 2: 44, 45, Dan. 7: 23-27; and even more pointedly if possible in the twelve shorter Prophets, in particular Joel 3: 1, 2, 9-14; Obadiah 15-21; Micah 4: 11-13, Micah 7: 15-20; Nahum 1: 2-6 ; Hab. 2: 13, 14, Hab. 3: 12, 13 ; Zeph. 3: 8, 19, 20; Haggai 2: 6, 7, 22; Zech. 9: 13, 14, Zech. 10: 3-9, Zech. 14: 1-4; Mal. 4: 1-3.

Vain imaginations can alter neither facts nor His control who will soon prove that, whatever the wicked rebellion of man, He works all things after the counsel of His own good and holy will. All the nations sprang from one forefather — all were involved in common sin, as ignorant of God as of themselves. Death from the first entered for parents and progeny. None can dispute that so it is now. The Athenians to their great loss knew not why it was. Revelation alone explained how sin came in; and happy he who on God's authority believes it and looks to the only Deliverer. Man could ruin but not save himself. Yet is it by His Son become man, Christ Jesus, that God righteously saves the chief of sinners, but only on his faith, not surely in his unbelief; for faith honours God, and the Son no less than the Father.

It is true that all nations from their rise forgot God, and that no one manifested the evil more than those to whose conscience the apostle was appealing. Notwithstanding their willing ignorance, God interested Himself in their actual circumstances, defining the appointed seasons of their national life, progress and fall, with the bounds of their dwelling. Their fresh trial as world-powers, on the ruin of Israel and Judah, only eventuated in greater pride, in compulsory idolatry, and in persecution of such as clung to the confession of the true God who had ordained them to rule.

Thus we see the prophet Jonah sent even before the catastrophe of the chosen people to the capital of the Assyrians; and the correction of the narrow selfishness which never appreciates goodness to the bad outside its own limits. God on the contrary would let His warning fall in presence of repentance. But as this touched the self-importance of the messenger, he fled till humbled by God's mighty hand. Even then in his fear that divine mercy might arrest judgment, he sulked till he took to heart the moral of the withered gourd that had sheltered him from the burning sun, and wrote the tale of his own folly, and of the pity that delighted to spare a mourning city of Gentiles, "wherein are more than six score persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle." Such was the God that Israel little knew, and the heathen not at all.

If it be so in only the seen and the temporal, how much more does His goodness in Christ extend to sinners, in view of man's loss of relation to Himself and its everlasting consequences! For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world and forfeit his own self? and what shall a man give in

exchange for his soul? Only what God gives and does can save the lost. None but the Only-begotten Son of God has life to bestow on the dead in sins when they have heard His voice. None but the Son of Man on the cross could avail to bear God's judgment of sin. Do you not know that Himself tells you so, that believing on Him you may not perish but have life eternal? What then clearer than that the Lord Jesus is the object of faith? Him the sinless One God made sin for us, who were His enemies, whether Jews or Greeks.

How plainly then salvation is not of works but of faith, that it might be according to grace, God's grace, not ours. Thus it avails for Gentiles in all their deadly ignorance and evil, equally as for Jews in their high-minded pride as to the law which only condemned them. Grace in Christ opens the blind eyes to see and judge self with all its sins, and the dumb lips to bless the God who commends His own love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. What has not God meant and found and given to the believer in that death? What does it not proclaim in the gospel to every lost creature? Thus it is that God has answered human distrust and disobedience and ruin by giving His best and unspeakable gift to save His worst foes, and make them through faith in His Son to love and serve Him who first loved them with a sovereign and creative love only possible to Himself.

TO SEEK GOD.

"To seek God, if indeed they might feel after and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us."

Acts 17: 27.

The diversity of nations gave the heathen of old, as it gives the unbelieving now, occasion to deny the unity of the race. But God made of one (blood) every nation of men to dwell on every face of the earth, whatever local traditions aver, whatever the dreams of early poets or of later philosophers or geographers. Man readily forgot himself, as well as God. If God was unknown, so was man's origin and creation: the very formula of *si deo, si deae*, betrayed his ignorance. Religiousness is natural even to the most corrupt of mankind; faith acceptable to God is supernatural. Superstition suits the devil not less than scepticism. Neither pleases God, who never left man that left Him, as he was justly banished by Him but not without the testimony of creation without and of conscience within.

Hence the apostle by the simple statement of divinely attested facts sets aside alike a multitude of independent deities and of independent nations derived from these Satanic impostors. He asserts one true God and one common race, whose fears, with independence of God and self-centring confidence in man, and means of effecting it in direct opposition to God's declared will, brought on dispersion by the different languages in their lands, after their tongues, their families, and their nations. For up to the deluge mankind was but one community, and, whatever their growing corruption and violence, no strange gods were set up against God. Nor had God inaugurated government as a human institution having authority from Him. When He did, it was left neither to fate nor to chance, but He determined the seasons, and the limits of their dwelling. Job 12: 23, etc. from early days shows how distinctly this was known by those who had the fear of God; and Deuteronomy 32: 8 goes even beyond what the apostle declared to the Athenians.

But providential disposal of the nations was far from all His care. He felt graciously for every soul of man, who in losing Him had lost the only and the necessary centre for the heart, and the basis for all true morality, of which known relationship to Him must be the corner-stone. This is touched in

verse 27 as His great aim for them individually — "to seek God,* if haply they might feel after and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." For man was fallen from God, and sin reigned in death; and thus death passed upon all men, for that all sinned. The sad fact is patent and undeniable. But God remained the God of goodness and mercy, ready to hear and forgive. But man must seek Him, conscious of sin, misery, and darkness. Hence God from the garden of Eden held out to guilty man, even before he was expelled as an inexcusable rebel, the hope of a Deliverer from the power of Satan, and, O what grace! to be born of woman, though the woman drew the man into her disobedience.

*"The Lord," as in the Authorised Version is a bad reading: "God" is in the best copies, and required by the truth intrinsically. What had the nations to do with "Jehovah"? What could they know of Him whom God made Lord and Anointed?

From the day of man's departure from God, one must seek God in grace and by grace. God uses means of all kinds to exercise the conscience as well as attract the heart. And He whom we know as the Lord Jesus Christ was ever the object of faith in some true way, however small the measure. God's goodness leads to repentance. The grace of Christ emboldens the weary and burdened sinner to confess his sins to God; and now that He is come, all is deepened and sure by the glad tidings of His grace. Even for the Jewish saints much was lacking which is now revealed in the gospel: how much less did poor benighted souls among the nations apprehend? Yet there were Gentiles who believed throughout the law; and we see in the book of Job believers before the law who were not of Israel. We may enter into the apostle's cautious language, "if haply [or indeed] they might feel after and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." Compared with the gospel after Christ's work, it was groping in the dark, save at least where the True Light was shining.

In every case of real conversion to God faith supposes the sinner brought to judge himself and own his sins to God, to renounce self-defence and to cast himself on God's grace in Christ. It was this grace that secretly drew, hindered despair, and sustained faith in the face of the most varied and serious difficulties; to know what God has wrought for the sinner in Christ's death and resurrection brings the believer into solid and abiding peace. But even before the Son of God came, and gave us an understanding to know Him that is true, God was not far from each one. If He interests Himself in a nation and its king and the meanest subject, if He will call into account national responsibility, as well as every soul that comes into judgment at the close, how He yearned over every troubled soul that sought Him! He that counts every hair of the believer's head and takes notice of each sparrow that falls took deep concern in the perplexed Gentile who hated his sins, and yet turned to God about them: it might be through the slightest gleam of the Light of men. No, He was not far from each one then; and now we hear the fullest clearest testimony that there is no difference of Jew and Greek; for the same Lord of all is rich toward all that call upon Him. "The word is near thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach: that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in thy heart that God raised him from out of the dead, thou shalt be saved."

IN HIM WE LIVE.

"For in Him we live and move and are, as also some of the poets among you have said, For we are also his offspring."

Acts 17: 28.

Not in ourselves, but in Him do men exercise their activity, and have their being when they no

longer live and move as in their existence here below. Death that closes all for every other animated creature on earth does not close man's being. Through one man, Adam, sin entered into the world, and death through sin, its present wages, but only in part, before its full payment, judgment, everlasting judgment. This is the second death, neither the first nor the second being extinction; for not only does man's soul exist for ever, but the Son of God shall call from the tomb both those that have done good to a resurrection of life, and those that have done ill to a resurrection of judgment: an unchangeable state respectively of bliss or of woe. So says the word of God: how bright for the believer, and how unutterably solemn for him that rejects the Father and the Son!

It is intelligible in a physical point of view to describe man as the sole species of his genus, and the sole representative of his order. But the apostle rises far above the natural philosophy, and regards him in his relation to God, and with that consciousness of it, which no other animated being on earth possesses. This the great enemy of God and man seeks to darken, if he cannot destroy it; but as revealed truth asserts that relation in the clearest terms, so the echo of it was heard even where the true God was not known. Hence the apostle could cite from Greeks themselves, centuries before he spoke: "As also some of the poets among you have said, For we are also his offspring." These precise words occur in the astronomical poem of Aratus, a Cilician like himself, the *Phaenomena*, extant to this day, and again with but one letter different, in the Stoic Cleanthes' hymn to Zeus, also extant.

It is so far infidelity, and very low infidelity, to doubt that man has an immortal soul. As to him only God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the skies, and over the cattle, and over the whole earth, and every creeping thing that creepeth on the earth. And God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Think of so exceptional a dignity given to man. But there is more in Genesis 2: 7, where relationship is treated, and not creation only. "And the LORD God formed man, dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Compare it with Genesis 1: 24 "Let the earth bring forth living souls after their kind; cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth, after their kind." Into none but man did Jehovah Elohim breathe the breath of life. He is thus doubly distinguished. from the rest of creation subjected to him as head, and alone brought into relationship with Him who inbreathed. Hence his soul had, by its constitution apart from grace and a new life, an association with God morally, peculiar to man. And he alone, while favoured beyond all, had a test of obedience applied in Paradise. Such a creature was responsible to obey God and must give an account to Him. Think of a horse or cow, a dog or a cat, levelled up to man's position, or man levelled down to theirs! Is it not rank insubjection to God's word? The sensuous and sensual Egyptians did not sink so low; they doubted not the soul's existence after death, and a future judgment, however crude and debased by their deification of the powers of nature.

Yes, in God man lives, moves, and is of quite another sort than those creatures whose soul is as evanescent as their bodies, and has no moral link with God. Man, no doubt, shares with them the "dust of the ground;" but even so, his position is naturally erect, his eye looks up, not down, his hand is unique as Sir C. Bell proved, to suit a soul and spirit and even a body peculiar to the race, to fill a responsible relationship with God, or the consequence of rebellion against Him. Hence in scripture "mortal" is never said of the soul, but of the body. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," has a quite different force, and means the person, the living human being, because the individuality lies in the soul, and led to such common phrases as "all the souls," etc., in Genesis 46: 15, 18, 22, 25, 26, 27. They were God's offspring, and so were the Athenians, though pagans, because all mankind shares the relationship, even if they make the grossest use of their natural privilege, deny their responsibility, reject the glad tidings of God's grace in Christ, and become objects of His judgment.

How then is it with you who read these words? Grace, God's grace, in Christ can alone save you, a guilty and lost sinner. Life for you, whose old life is forfeited through sin, is nowhere but in the Son; and now is proclaimed to sinners everywhere and of every sort, but only to such as believe God about His Son. Do you speak of your sins as fearful, and your state as an active source of evil in His sight? It is sadly true; but I rejoice if you own it humbly, frankly, and fully to God. Confess your sins to Him who sent His Son as propitiation for our sins, whose blood cleanseth the believer from every sin. It was He, not you, that paid redemption's price, a price beyond the value of all worlds, the precious blood of God's Son, God's Lamb. What could you offer as a sinner but sins? Are you not altogether sin in your nature as it is? So His word declares: what are your words, your thoughts, your feelings? Redemption lies wholly in the worth and work, not of the redeemed, but of the Redeemer.

Beware of bolstering your case on God's natural Fatherhood. Were not the head fallen and the race sinful, this might plead for living and against death. But as you are, you need a new and eternal life and an everlasting redemption; and the Saviour God of all grace calls you to receive both by faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus.

THE DIVINE.

"Being therefore God's offspring, we ought not to think the divine is like gold or silver or stone, graven by man's art and thought."

Acts 17: 29.

Men are God's offspring, not because they have a body, as all animals have, nor even a soul and spirit, as they too have, suited to their place and function in creation, but because they have an inner man direct from God by His inbreathing. This we know, as no Athenians did, and as not a few Christians forget, from the only reliable account in Genesis 2: 7: "and Jehovah Elohim formed man [of] dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul," or person. This assuredly explains why of all on earth man alone has an immortal soul for good or for ill beyond calculation, and why he must give account to God. But here the apostle used this relationship (from the peculiarity of the immaterial part of his nature) to prove the folly of an idolatrous image to represent God. No doubt, man's body was formed in divine wisdom with a view to the soul and spirit communicated by a subsequent and intimate act of Jehovah Elohim in giving him only the inner man from His own breath. From this fact flows his moral relationship to God; and he alone of earth's beings has it.

But this fact refutes the irrationalism of idol (or image) worship of God. For it is in the immaterialism of his nature that man is thus God's offspring. His soul and spirit only are from God's inbreathing; and in this he stood alone here below. Therefore, as urged, "we ought not to think the divine is like gold or silver or stone, graven by man's art and thought." The sculpture of these material substances by man's skill and imagination only adds absurdity to absurdity. For the material was but a creature of God; and the shape given to each was man's fancy and manufacture. "God is a spirit," and so can be omnipresent, as man's conscience bears witness to His penetrating energy throughout all mankind, unless stupefied by sin and infidelity, which drown thought of Him. But He is behind all ineffaceably, though Satan poses as the god of the world, deifying men's lusts to gratify them, and the pride of deceased ancestors, and the powers of nature above and below, as he works by demons who personate the various national divinities which are but names to deceive.

But there is a true and perfect image of the invisible God, Jesus the Lord, not only unknown to the Greek and the nations universally, but unwelcome to the Jew in his unbelief, Who revealed God in His essence and attributes and relationship of Father, as He the eternal Word and Son knew Him; Who brought God nigh to man in His life and service, and brought nigh to God all who believe, be they Jew or Gentile. To this end He is, as He must be, both true God, and perfect man, in one Person. And He is the only safe-guard from false gods and from idols, from idols of the mind no less than material images. He too is the one mediator of God and men, Christ Jesus, not only God but man; Who gave Himself a ransom for all, the testimony in its own times, when Jew and Gentile condemned themselves as reprobates and lost sinners by condemning the only Righteous One and hating the God who sent His Son in saving grace.

O what a contrast between the enemy deifying sinful men and their fears and passions and their ideas of vanity, with real demons unseen becoming thus objects of worship; and God the Father giving the Christian fellowship with Himself and His Son by the Holy Ghost! Therein is God kept in His own supreme place, and man, believing man, put into his true position of dependence and subjection, yet brought even now into the relationship of His child in all the confidence of His perfect love which has cast out all fear through our Lord Jesus. All other images are but the shameless rivals of the great enemy's hatred of Him; the resuscitated spawn of Paganism, which the Lord vanquished in the seeming defeat of His cross, when He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them publicly, leading them in triumph by it. And to what is Christendom returning but homage to these spectres of darkness, as the Jews will shortly in these last days, before grace creates the "generation to come?"

REPENTANCE ENJOINED.

"The times however of ignorance God overlooked, but now enjoineeth men that all everywhere repent."

Acts 17: 30.

The apostle refers to "the times of ignorance" before the gospel came, not only to believers personally, but also in all the world bearing fruit and growing. It was an immense change for Gentiles as such, predicted by Simeon as he held the infant Saviour in his arms and said, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou preparedst before the face of all the peoples, a light for revelation of Gentiles [or nations], and glory of thy people Israel." Israel's glory is postponed because of their unbelief, but Christ meanwhile is a light for unveiling Gentiles till Israel's heart turns to the Lord when he shall be saved.

Thus for a season the old condition is reversed. The chosen people who had the only religious privileges enjoyed on earth lost them for their rejection of their own Messiah; and "Be it known therefore to you, that this salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles; they also will hear." Accordingly too he wrote to the saints in Rome (the then Gentile metropolis), "By their fall [there is] salvation to the Gentiles to provoke them to jealousy. But if their fall [be the] world's wealth, and their loss Gentiles' wealth, how much more their fulness?" And so the fulness of Israel will prove under the Messiah and the new covenant. Truly it will be the glory of His people Israel when their brightest hopes are more than realised, and the earth shall yield her increase, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him, yea, the whole earth shall be filled with His glory.

Here the apostle confines himself to the fact that God, instead of executing judgment on the times of deplorable and inexcusable ignorance, in His goodness overlooked the past, and now calls to repentance. It was no longer the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea; it was no longer the Twelve sent only to the lost sheep of Israel's house, and expressly not into a way of Gentiles nor into a city of Samaritans. Now that the rejected Christ died as propitiation and was raised up, He Himself marks the change now come: "Go therefore, make disciples of all the Gentiles;" "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all the creation;" "Thus it is written and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the Gentiles, beginning with Jerusalem," the guiltiest of all on earth!

How true it is that the message of God's love in salvation to every one that believes is His own command! The apostle (himself called as apostle of Gentiles by the Lord from heaven) was then acting as His ambassador, when he proclaimed to the Athenians that "God now enjoineeth men that all everywhere repent." The Gentiles who ignored the true God, and set up idols to His dishonour and their own shame, are no more ignored of God. "The true light already shineth." Coming into the world it lightens every man. It is true that the world was so blind as not to know Him. But the God of all grace does not leave them to their folly; He sends this charge to them, that they should "all everywhere repent." What compassion for and concern in "all everywhere"!

No sinner, no child of fallen man, had ever turned to God in faith as all did from Abel downward without repentance. It is faith that produces it if real and Godward, though it may not be yet for many souls faith in the glad tidings. But faith in God's word invariably causes it; and its character is self-judgment before Him. Not only one's ways, but one's self, is laid naked as seen by His holy eyes with whom we have to do.

Without doubt, there is a changed and new mind about God, which is rather the effect of faith; but this in itself is never repentance. For repentance is by grace the soul's eye turned on itself and seeing only and continually its guilt, its evil. Faith which produces repentance is in no way repentance; it looks away from self to Christ for the remission of the sins which repentance condemns, and condemns one's self for without an excuse before God.

Feeble faith, like the absence of it, shrinks from this moral weighing and estimate of ourselves as God sees us; it is in a hurry to get pardon at once, content with that, or with zeal turning preacher, and thus slurring over so essential a work *in* us, because of joy in Christ's work *for* us. But this negligent haste is as unscriptural as it is a wrong to God and a dangerous lack for our souls.

The apostle then, having already preached Jesus and the resurrection in the market-place, speaks on the Areopagus of their life of idolatrous rebellion against the One True God, and presses on their conscience God's present injunction to men, that they all everywhere should repent. He waits on all, and graciously welcomes in Christ's name all who repent and believe the gospel.

O my reader, have you repented? Do you repent now of your thoughtless, guilty, selfish life? You need to repent as truly as the Athenians. The door is open; and Jesus is the door to God and all His grace. The true sense of your badness is morally in you the beginning of goodness. May it be the goodness of God "leading thee to repentance." Repent and believe the gospel. The Father hitherto and the Son work; they had not found as yet an adequate ground for the true and everlasting sabbatism. There was perfection in Jesus; but till He died atoningly, He abode alone. Divine love would have much fruit through His death for and in us who believe.

THE RISEN JUDGE.

"Because he set a day in the which he is about to judge the inhabited earth in righteousness by a man Whom he appointed, affording proof to all in that he raised him from among the dead."

Acts 17: 31.

Here the apostle applies the truth to the conscience. He had preached "Jesus and the resurrection" in the market-place; but in this, whether to wit or ignorance or both, he seemed a setter forth of strange divinities. Now on Areopagus he proclaims the risen Jesus, whom God ordained to be the judge of living men on the earth, after having insulted the One living and true, the Creator and sustainer of the universe, by their many gods and many lords, the demons of the Pagan world. But he also points to the new and fatal sin of that generation, which the Gentiles shared with the still more guilty Jews, the crucifixion of His Son and righteous servant Jesus, God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

It was divine love coming down from the height of glory, and deigning, in the person of the Son, to become man in the midst of sinful and wretched men to seek and to save the lost. This they would not have but disdained. When He fed the hungry, cured the sick and raised the dead, cast out evil spirits, rebuked the wind and the waves, they wondered and admired. Such a man exalted mankind; but it was another thing to convict them of guilt, warn them of everlasting judgment, and speak of giving His life as a ransom in God's grace toward His enemies, that whosoever believed on Him should not perish but have life eternal. For where man did his worst, there also God did His best; and human enmity was far exceeded by divine love. The soldier's insolent spear drew forth from the dead Saviour's heart water and blood: the emblems of what purifies the unclean, and what atones for the guilty. Compare John 19: 32-37, and 1 John 5: 6-8.

O my reader, is not this what the sinner needs? So I have found by faith: if you have not, lose not a moment and submit to the truth. God in His word presents it to you and any other, as to me and every one who has already believed. The Holy Spirit attests the three witnesses in the gospel to every creature. O the sin of despising such love! To refuse it is to make your case worse than a pagan's.

The resurrection of the Lord is alike the ground of faith God has given you, and the warning of a day when He will judge the quick. For Him whom man condemned to the cross God raised up again, as He Himself over and over uttered to the dull ears of His disciples. When He hung on the tree God laid the awful burden of sin upon Him, made the sinless One sin for us, that we who believe might become His righteousness in Christ.

It was God's righteousness, not ours, for we were the sinners for whom He became substitute. Thus is God just in justifying the believer, who owns his sins and finds Him not sparing His own Son that we might be washed clean for His presence. Jesus is ready to judge the habitable world which cast Him out. The world and all in it inherit this load of guilt unremoved to this day. The only way to escape judgment is to repent and believe the gospel. This God enjoins on all men everywhere, as we saw. Is not this grace to every creature? But grace rejected seals your guilt. Jesus is coming, first to receive His own for His Father's house; secondly, to judge in righteousness the inhabited earth, not yet the dead but living man everywhere. He, knowing well how incredulous most would be, said, "when the Son of man cometh [*i.e.* for His second and judicial act], shall he find faith on the earth?"

Beware then that you trifle not, lest you prove His words true in your everlasting ruin. He tells you in Luke 17 how that day is to be. "As it came to pass in the days of Noah, so also shall it be in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank; they married, they were given in marriage; until the day

that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all. And in like manner as it came to pass in the days of Lot. They ate, they drank; they bought, they sold; they planted, they builded. But on the day that Lot went out from Sodom, it rained fire and sulphur from heaven, and destroyed all. After the same manner shall it be in the day that the Son of man is revealed."

The judgment of the dead is under wholly different conditions, which it is folly to confound with that of the quick. More like it in a slight degree was the destruction of Jerusalem, and on a far smaller scale. But the words added by our Lord are incompatible with either, and describe what will be when He appears for the judgment of living man. "In that day, he who shall be on the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not go down to take it away; and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember the wife of Lot;" and so to the end of the chapter, I might cite words quite inapplicable to the siege of Titus, still less to the judgment of the dead before the "great White Throne," when the earth and heaven shall have fled before the Judge's face; whereas every word tallies with His coming to judge the living.

Is it not truly ominous — the unbelief of man so nearly concerned, and with issues so incalculable? Jews have no difficulty in looking for a divine judgment on the living, and expect the verification of their national hopes in a destruction to fall on all the nations of the earth when they are gathered to their land for more than pristine glory under David and Solomon. But they are little alive to the clear account of the judgment of the dead. Christendom acknowledges the judgment of the dead, but puts it off indefinitely and mixes it up with the judgment of the quick; so that the power of neither tells, as both ought, on the conscience. Nor can there be a plainer proof of this error than its effect in confounding two scriptures so distinct as Matt. 25: 31-46 and Rev. 20: 12-18; for in the first is found not one dead man, in the second not one living. Tradition blurs them into one, and makes both interpretations erroneous. Thereby is lost the profit from each, which rightly understood is very great. A vague muddle takes their place, which is not only inconsistent with what God has revealed, but helps on unbelief in defiance of every word which proceedeth from His mouth.

But the resurrection of Jesus disarms the believer of all fear, whether from the judgment of the living at the beginning of the Kingdom to come, or from the judgment of the dead at its end. The believer will be manifested before His judgement-seat, and will give account of all done in the body; but as the Lord unmistakably declared, he "cometh not into judgment," being already justified. Now it is God that justifieth; and if God be for us, who against? Till the disciples understood it in the light of scripture, they were filled with perplexity and gloom, as we read in the beginning of Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20, yet soon dispersed by His blessed light and joy. He that was so dear and well-known stood in the midst on the resurrection day, "and saith to them, Peace to you. And having said this, he showed to them his hands and his side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord." Does He change? or the efficacy of His death? or the triumphant peace and joy of His resurrection? He that had the power of death was vanquished, the sins blotted out by His blood, the judgment of God borne on the cross, man in Him entering on a new order of being, fit for the presence and glory of God above, and for the Holy Spirit to indwell here below meanwhile.

Such was the virtue of His death displayed in the power of resurrection, and given as the portion of every Christian thenceforward able to say, His Father and my Father, His God and my God, while looking forward with assurance to a hope as glorious as the faith is certain, both flowing out of God's love from eternity and to eternity, known by His word and enjoyed now in the power of His Spirit. For there is no privilege of Christianity more characteristic than the gift of the indwelling Spirit, as seal of the Christian and earnest of his inheritance of glory. Nor is there any truth more feebly, if at all known, in Christendom; which glories in the first man and his science, not in the Second; as indeed

they are, as the scripture shows, incompatible and mutually exclusive.

THE RESULT, — THEN AS NOW.

"And when they heard of resurrection of dead [men], some mocked, and others said, We will hear thee again concerning this. Thus Paul went out from their midst. But certain men clave to him; among whom also was Dionysius the Areopagite. and a woman by name Damaris, and others with them."

Acts. 17: 32-34

Resurrection once more aroused resistance and derision. Some mocked; and others said, "We will hear thee again concerning this." To hear the apostle again was more than man could insure. Mockers and doubters shall certainly hear the voice of the risen Jesus, when the hour comes for a "resurrection of judgment," which will vindicate the truth to His glory, and prove the worthlessness of the unbeliever, and his deeds evil in God's sight; as those who believe receive life eternal now, walk in obedience, bear good fruit, and rise to a "resurrection of life."

Creation is a standing witness of God to all mankind, did they but stop to consider. It was in its final shape complete before man (the head by God's appointment of all the earthly sphere) was formed, and formed in full vigour of mind and body to look upon it all around him and to hold converse with God without a cloud or suspicion. Creation was a vast miracle; but Adam was not there to see its several parts. He saw the effects in their beauty where all was very good.

Such is the testimony of the Bible as afterwards written by Moses, admitted to divine intercourse beyond others save the Son of man who could say when on earth that He was in heaven; Man but infinitely more than man, who cites Moses as giving God's truth as far as then revealed. And when we think out what we are told of man and every other on earth created not in embryo but in full growth, we cannot but feel how such an account approves itself to us as befitting both God the Creator and the creature.

The most pronounced Freethinkers, the Positivist Mill, and the Agnostic Spencer, admit that secondary causes fail to explain the universe, and that primeval causes (for they thus own a *causa causans*) must have operated before, behind and above all that men can apprehend. How much more is One who announces His death by lawless hands, and His rising on the third day, with the amplest evidence that so He did rise! Then seen, heard, felt by unimpeachable witnesses, manifestly not a result of natural causes, it is God's action for the worthiest reason and His own glory in the midst of this world's evil and unbelief.

But resurrection is a tremendous shock to the race as reversing all the system of causes and effects with which they are familiar day by day, which they call reflective life. Man is painfully familiar with death and tries to think it natural. But it is not, though appearing so now. God made man with provision to live, if he did not disobey Him. Man disobeyed, and death, as God warned, entered as a penalty through his transgression. But even then the LORD God appeared, convicted Adam and Eve respectively of their sin, traced it up to the enemy, the old serpent, and in sentencing the deceiver announced the triumph of grace in the woman's Seed, who, in His body however bruised, should crush the enemy for ever.

Thus was the Saviour's death to be turned to endless gain for all who believe, and to the glory of

God who gave His Son to be born of woman that it might be so. But His death was followed by His resurrection, as it must be both on His own account as a divine person no less than from the Father's glory, truth, and righteousness, for the peace, joy, and blessing of His own. It is too the witness to His foes that, alive again for evermore, He is coming to judge the habitable earth, where men listened to the old enemy and put Him to death: the awful sin of man, and the wondrous grace of God as the propitiation for our sins. His resurrection and going up into His glory is a pledge that He died a sacrifice for all that believe, and that God has accepted the sacrifice on our behalf, and Him who offered it for His glory.

Christ's resurrection from among the dead is the witness of perfect deliverance from sin and all its consequences, and of entrance on a new life in imperishable blessedness. It is not only that the Heir of all things should be glorified; but He now acts in the power of that grace which will bring all who believe to share His absolutely new order of things, in our souls now by faith, next in our bodies, and in the inheritance itself, when He comes again in glory.

Some think like certain Athenians after Plato of the soul's immortality, but forget their responsibility for sin, and look not to God to be saved from their sins and His judgment. Man glorifies himself in that; yet the soul's immortality does not save from everlasting ruin, but "Jesus only." And resurrection then becomes our joyful hope founded on His; "Because I live, ye shall live also:" a life now for our souls, at His coming for our bodies; a life of victory over death and judgment, a life of heavenly and everlasting glory.

The hopes of man are through science, politics, education and the like to ameliorate the old and fallen creation. But they might see if not blinded by Satan that evil men and impostors wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. The fashion of this world passeth; yea, the world itself is passing, and its lust; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. Resurrection declares the unmistakable power of God in Christ vanquishing Satan. In Him Man has conquered to bring those who believe into His wholly new state according to God's counsels.

Whenever souls fail to apprehend this in the Spirit, they get occupied with man and the world, striving to amend society and improve the general state. Never did Christ any thing of the sort; nor did the apostles and prophets essay such measures. They taught that man is dead, that life is in Christ, that He only is the all and in all; that He is coming to take His own to the Father's house; and that He and they will shortly after appear in glory to judge the inhabited earth in righteousness, before the judgment of the dead.

But man, as he dreads God out of a bad conscience, either derides openly or politely puts off. Nevertheless God does His gracious work. A man of weight bowed to the truth and the grace he heard, Dionysius the Areopagite, as did a woman named Damaris and others. But the rest abode in their unbelief, and the apostle went forth from their midst with the message of God's good tidings for such as have an ear to hear.

How is it with you, dear reader, as you scan these lines? By man came sin and death; but by man, the Second man, came the resurrection. This points to the Lord as the Deliverer of those who believe on Him, and the Judge of all who are indifferent and turn away from Him. But why should you perish, when He is at hand, the Life and the Saviour for all that call upon Him? Remain as you are, and you are lost for ever. Receive Him, and you are born of God. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them life eternal; and they shall never perish, and none shall seize out of my hand. My Father who hath given [them] to me is greater than all, and none can seize out of the hand of my Father. I and the Father are one."

