

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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"JESUS CHRIST, THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TODAY, AND FOR EVER."
"ENDEAVOURING TO KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND
OF PEACE."

"COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE, SAITH YOUR GOD."

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EDITORIAL

A liar giving vigorous support to the spread of the truth might seem a strange contradiction. But in fact it is a method which has proved highly successful in the hands of that master liar, the Devil. It is not that he has any love for the truth. Quite the reverse! He hates the truth and wants to hinder the truth. But superb strategist that he is, he knows only too well that there are more ways of attacking a position than mounting a frontal assault which is so obvious that it is easily detected.

So at times he seems to give the truth a free passage. Indeed, he goes further and encourages the witness to the truth, but his encouragement is a cloak for his old ploy of side-tracking the servant of God. Thus he not only allows us to re-discover truths which have been neglected, but he pushes us to concentrate on them to such an extent that one segment of truth is cultivated at the expense of others. The preacher becomes an expert in one field to such an extent that he ends with a sorry lack of balance.

He employs the same method when he inveigles us into attacking some error which we see to be a serious hindrance to the truth of the gospel and the well-being of the people of God. It is good to engage in vigorous controversy so that error is exposed and heresy challenged. But again it is sadly possible for the Christian to become unbalanced so that his testimony—or his preaching if he is a minister—becomes one continuous onslaught on a particular error.

An unbalanced testimony or an unbalanced preaching ministry produce serious consequences. The man himself is affected. He cannot spend his time studying and preaching one aspect of truth to the neglect of other aspects without suffering serious loss in his own soul. Spiritual malnutrition follows from an unbalanced diet. Serious lack in our spiritual food will prove as debilitating to the soul as will a defective diet to the body.

Then again the man who is always on the attack will inevitably end up with a hard and censorious attitude. It is good to engage in controversy for the truth's sake. It is bad to become a mere controversialist. It is good to be sensitive to the insidious influence of false teaching. It is bad to degenerate into a heresy hunter whose suspicions become almost pathological.

But the unhappy consequences are not confined to the man himself. A lack of balance in the pulpit will lead to a similar condition in the pew. A congregation can also develop an obsessive interest in one subject so that prophecy, for example, dominates all other issues. They may likewise develop an unhealthy appetite for polemic. In Ulster if you mount a constant assault on Rome you will be sure of a large and appreciative congregation.

Then by a process of producing reaction the Devil wins further victories. Christians become so weary of the incessant harping on one theme that they react violently and ignore completely the truth which has been overstressed ad nauseam. So, too, they are so tired of listening to the constant tirade against error that they end by having a degree of tolerance for the error. One could multiply illustrations of this. People react, for example, from the excessive speculation of some experts in the field of prophecy to such an extent that they end by neglecting the vital truth of Christ's return. Christians are so bombarded by an unceasing talk of the gifts of the Spirit, often at the expense of the fruit of the Spirit, that they lapse into the disastrous attitude of ignoring the Holy Spirit. Others find the unending attack on Rome so wearisome that they go to the opposite extreme and endorse the shallowness of much current ecumenism.

What is the answer? We need to be watchful and to be aware of Satan's devices. We need to know ourselves and to be on the alert to detect any lack of balance, any tendency to over-concentration, any proneness to be perpetually aggressive.

(concluded on page 157)

EVEN GREATER MIRACLES

H. M. CARSON

*A sermon preached in Hamilton Road
Baptist Church, Bangor, Co. Down, on
Sunday morning, 24th January, 1971.*

We turn this morning to the passage which I read in Acts chapter 9 : 32-43 the story of the healing of Aeneas and of the raising of Dorcas or Tabitha from the dead. You remember that at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles Luke introduces his history in these terms: he speaks about the former book which he had written which was Luke's gospel, 'The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach'. So as far as Luke was concerned the gospels spoke of what Jesus began to do, and the present book which he is writing speaks of what Jesus continued to do. So for him there is continuity throughout; the Acts of the Apostles is not distinct from the Gospel. In the Gospel it is Jesus of Nazareth in the days of His earthly ministry who teaches and heals, and raises from the dead. In the Acts of the Apostles, He continues to work. But He is no longer present in bodily form; for at the outset there is the account of His ascension. So He is not present with His church as He was with the believers prior to His death and resurrection, He is in the presence of God. But none the less He continues to be among His people; and by the gift of His Spirit, and through the indwelling of the Spirit in the lives of His people, the living Lord continues to be among His people. So the miracles in the Acts of the Apostles are not distinct or different from the miracles which take place in the gospel narrative. Jesus began and Jesus continues, and the narrative in the Acts of the Apostles is simply the continuing story of the living Lord in the midst of His people.

You will also remember how the Lord spoke to His disciples prior to His death. He spoke of the future. He spoke of the gift of the Spirit which would transform them so that they would be able to exercise the ministry which He purposed they should exercise. He said this, 'The works that I do shall you do also, and greater works than these shall you do because I go to my Father'. 'The works that I do, you will do

also.' Now what were the works which Jesus did? Well, they were the works of healing, the works of power, the mighty works, the miraculous, supernatural works, and He says, 'You will do these works'. So in the pages of the Acts of the Apostles we read the record of such miracles as the ones which are recorded here in chapter 9, when they continue to do the same kind of works that He did. But said Jesus, 'Greater works than these shall you do', and someone might say—But what greater work can there be than the miracles which Jesus wrought? What greater work could there be than raising a man from the dead? What are these greater works?

Well, quite clearly, the greater works are the preaching of the gospel and the consequences that flow from the preaching of the gospel. When that gospel is preached, and when God applies that word to the lives of men and women, the great miracle takes place and they are born again; because a response to the gospel is not on the purely natural level. It is not like a man listening for example to a political speech, and he decides to transfer his allegiance from one political party to another because he is persuaded by the arguments which this particular political protagonist presents for his party. Response to the gospel is of a different kind altogether. When a man listens to the gospel he is not merely listening to a religious statement by a man putting a particular point of view, he is listening to a word from God. And his listening is not simply in terms of ordinary intelligent hearing—obviously that is present, so that he understands the arguments, he understands the message—but true understanding of the gospel is due to the enlightenment of the Spirit of God, so that he can see it. He can see not simply the development of the story or the argument which the apostle Paul presents for example in the epistle to the Romans, he understands the significance of it. He realises why Christ died, that it was for his sins; why Christ rose, it was for his justification, and by God's grace he is enabled to close with God's offer of mercy and to receive Christ's free and full salvation. Now this is a supernatural experience. Becoming a Christian is to be involved in a miracle. Indeed, said Jesus, it is an even greater miracle than the one which was wrought when Lazarus was raised from the dead, because while it was a marvellous display of the power of God, it is eclipsed by the surpassing wonder of that power of God manifest when a man who is dead in trespasses and sins is raised to newness of life.

Now the apostle Peter is going to be involved in one of these greater works and it is in chapter ten than we read the

story of the opening of the door to the Gentiles. This will be a great new step forward in the life of the early church. This is the reason why God has prepared for this hour, that the gospel which up to that point had been largely preached among Jews is going to be preached to the Gentiles, and the church which up to this point had been largely composed of Jews will now embrace men and women of every tribe and nation and tongue. So chapter ten will record one of the decisive happenings of the early history of the church of Christ, a momentous happening, whose consequences still abide with us. It was to be the opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles. And such a momentous occurrence was indeed a demonstration of the power of God. God was going to reach into the Gentile world. God was going to reach men and women outside the fold of Israel with the message of Israel's Messiah, and they would turn to the Saviour. So these miracles recorded in Acts chapter nine are as it were the prelude to the even greater miracle of Acts chapter ten. 'The works that I do shall you do also'—well, here is Peter doing those works. 'Greater works than these shall you do'—you will preach to the Gentiles and you will see the Gentiles coming through the convicting work of the Spirit of God to a knowledge of the Saviour.

So we look at these miracles this morning in that context, against the background of Christ's words. When you read this narrative you cannot but be impressed by the similarity of these miracles and two of the miracles which the Lord Jesus Himself wrought. The healing of Aeneas, this man who had been crippled for eight years, is reminiscent of the story of the healing of the palsied man of Capernaum. You recall the occasion when his friends, desperately concerned that their friend should be healed, broke open the tiling of the roof and let him down in his litter before the Lord Jesus. You will remember how the Lord spoke the healing word, and it was a word very similar to the word which Peter spoke here to Aeneas; a word of healing, a word which told him to get up and take his bed and walk. The raising of Tabitha is very similar to the raising of Jairus's daughter. Indeed if Peter spoke Aramaic on this occasion, which is very likely as it was his vernacular, he virtually said the same thing. When Jesus took the hand of the little girl He said, 'Talitha cumi, little girl arise'. Well Peter said, 'Tabitha cumi, Tabitha arise', and I am sure that if he used those words, and his use of the word had been preceded by the same kind of action that Jesus had used when He put the mourners out (he was going to do

something that would produce joy and not grief), he must have had in his mind that day when the Lord had wrought a great miracle and raised a little girl from the dead. So what we are seeing here is the continuance of the work which Jesus began to do and which He is now continuing to do through His apostles.

Now we have to face the fact that in these days the miraculous element of the New Testament is under attack. It has of course been under attack for a long time. Indeed it has been under attack from the days of the early church, because in the early days of the preaching of the gospel there were men in the Gentile pagan world who directed all their arguments against the gospels and tried to dismiss the supernatural element. It has continued like that right down the years. But the serious thing is that today the attack upon the miraculous in the gospel narrative is not coming from outside—one expects the humanist to attack, one expects the agnostic or atheist to attack, but the attack today is coming from within the church. It is very often in the ranks of those who are supposed to be preachers of the Word, or theologians instructing the preachers of the Word, it is from these directions that we find the attack being launched upon the miraculous. Indeed you will remember it was about a year ago that there was a great flurry in Irish Presbyterian circles when the young minister in Knock church dismissed a miracle, and he seems to have remained—presumably to continue to dismiss the miracles. But he is not alone; he represents a great many who would take this attitude.

This attitude will often be presented along these lines. They will say that the first century was a very credulous age so that when people thought of religious issues they inevitably thought of the miraculous; so for example, if you read the mythology of Greek and Roman authors you find the gods and the goddesses performing all kinds of wonderful works, and you have the heroic figures, the servants of the gods and the goddesses likewise performing prodigious feats. So, the critic says, the New Testament writers moved in this atmosphere and naturally with the same credulity they would accept these traditional stories of what Jesus did and what the early apostles did. Now I believe we have got to look at that kind of criticism, we have got to attempt to answer it; there is no use by-passing it. Some of us here who are older may not need to face this problem but young people in the schools who are having compulsory divinity will know very well that this is the kind of thing that often crops up, and we can't

just dismiss it and ignore the criticism, we have to face it.

How do we face it? In the first place I would say it is important to notice that the miraculous or supernatural happenings are not scattered in any haphazard fashion across the pages of Scripture. Rather they are focused at certain points both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament; they are focused at the point where God is doing a new thing and where God is revealing Himself in a special way. That is why in the Old Testament you do not find miracles scattered across all the narratives, but you find them for example at the time of the Exodus when God is doing a great thing and delivering His people from Egypt. You find them at the time of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal when Israelite religion, the pure religion of Jehovah, was under tremendous pressure and attack, and in the days of Elijah and Elisha, God, through the miracles which were wrought by the prophets, declared the truth of His word. You see them again in the days of the exile when Judah was carried into exile into Babylon. It would have been very easy for them to touch rock bottom as far as discouragement and indeed despair were concerned. You remember the poignant cry of the psalmist, 'By the rivers of Babylon we sat down yea we wept when we remembered Zion', and you get the sense of complete despair. And it was in that situation, in Babylon, in the ministry of Daniel, and through the testimony of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that God not only spoke but He wrought miracles to demonstrate His power and His presence among His people. So when you come to the New Testament, it is in the coming of the Messiah, the great climax of all God's purposes for which the Old Testament has been preparing, it is in that coming of the Messiah, that you find this element of the miraculous again coming into prominence.

When we turn to the Acts of the Apostles and go right on through the New Testament, we find the miracles are not so numerous. There are not so many in the Acts of the Apostles because as the gospel continues to be preached, as churches come into being, you have a living testimony to the message which they are bringing; the testimony of the transformed lives of men and women is a standing witness that greater works are being wrought in their lives and so you do not need the lesser works of the supernatural miracles. God is working in the lives of men and women, and so as the testimony increases and also as the Scriptures of the New Testament are produced, there is less need for the miraculous. So in

the Acts of the Apostles you do not have miracles scattered ad lib through its pages, there are comparatively few miracles but they are very significant ones.

Then another way in which we answer this criticism is to point out that New Testament miracles are of a different kind altogether from the sort of miracles which the credulous pagans of the first century so readily accepted. You find in the first century various supposedly Christian books appearing—why were they not accepted when the Gospels and the Epistles and the Acts were accepted? It was because of the kind of books they were; the kind of miracles that *they* record are the same trivial and childish displays of power which the credulous would have accepted. The kind of story which told of how Jesus, when He was a small boy in Nazareth, made clay birds, and when He made clay birds He gave life to them and they flew away. The story of how Peter took a dried fish and made it swim. This kind of puerile narrative characterises the miracle literature of the first and second centuries and people were ready to listen. They accepted it, it was a credulous age, but you see that kind of so called miracle, that spurious miracle, is utterly different from the kind of miracle you find in the New Testament. There is nothing absurd, nothing puerile, about these miracles, when Jesus comes to man in his great physical need or in mental need and heals, or when He raises someone from the dead. So I say, in face of the critics who argue that the New Testament is simply reflecting a credulous age, I would say the New Testament miracles are of a different character altogether from those which pandered to the credulity of the first century.

There is one further answer and it is this: the kind of miracles that you find in the popular literature of the first and second century were ultimately purposeless; they were really rather futile, apart from the absurdity of some of them. The miracles in the Gospels and the Acts are not purposeless or aimless, they have a very definite purpose. God is not working these miracles just for the sake of working them. They are not intended simply to be empty displays of power. They are meaningful, they are significant and they are pointing to a great truth. What is the truth? Well John mentions it in his gospel; he speaks of the record which he has made and his reason for recording the miracles. 'These things are written,' he says, 'that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God and that believing you may have life

in His Name.' That is why these supernatural events took place. That is why God intervened dramatically in the created order at these particular points. It was in order to demonstrate that a quite unusual thing had happened; that the incarnation of Jesus Christ was not simply one more event during the long period of human history, but that this was *the* great event, the great decisive event of all history, that God had entered among men in the person of His Son. So He attests His coming, He authenticates the Saviour by these mighty acts. And now that these apostles are preaching the gospel and speaking of Christ crucified and risen, God continues to act in this sovereign fashion; that men may be brought to realise that this is not one more competing religious theory among the many theories which the philosophers produced in the Greek world of the first century, but this is a word that comes from God and a word that is backed home by the power of God.

So we meet the critics of the miraculous in the New Testament. But in addition we must be positive, and we must ask further questions about these miracles. We must study them to ask what their character is, in order that we may learn from them. But I believe it is important to do this for another reason. We hear sometimes accounts of healing, and in some cases I am persuaded that God does thus heal directly. Ultimately of course the skill of the doctor is a skill which his Creator has given to him, and the very means he uses are means which his Creator has provided for him. The research which the medical scientist engages in is really to understand more fully the created order which God has entrusted to us in order that he might make use of its resources to bring healing to men and women. So we must not set divine healing over against human healing—both are ultimately from God. But there are healings which are direct rather than indirect, when God directly and immediately heals. Now there is a great deal of talk in Christian circles these days about such healings and sometimes indeed the suggestion seems to be implied that unless you are seeing these healings, there is something seriously defective about your Christianity and about your witness, and certainly about your knowledge and experience of the Holy Spirit.

For this reason I believe it is important to go back and look at these healings, and it is important to notice one big difference—there is a confidence here, an assurance, a certainty; there is nothing hit or miss about these miracles. Peter says

quite clearly, 'Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you', and at once he is restored. 'Tabitha arise', and at once she is restored. Now in modern healing, sometimes people are healed and sometimes they are not. When the healings are performed in the Gospels or in the Acts, I say there is nothing hit or miss. It is not 'perhaps' or even 'probably'; there is a certainty about it. They obviously know quite clearly that God is going to work and God is going to heal. That is why they know, not only when to act, but they know also when to withhold action. So while here you get Aeneas healed, and Tabitha raised from the dead, you also get incidents in the New Testament where people are not healed. You get for example the case of Timothy. Paul, to whom God had given power in this matter, obviously did not exercise that power as far as Timothy was concerned. In fact he prescribed ordinary medicinal remedies; he says, 'Take a little wine for thy stomach's sake and for thine oft infirmities'. Why didn't he lay his hands on Timothy? Why didn't he heal him? Or take the case of Trophimus; Paul records how he left Trophimus at Miletus, still sick; why didn't he lay his hands on him? Why didn't he pray the prayer of faith? Why didn't he raise him up? Listen to Paul writing to the Philippians, and he is talking about Epaphroditus and how he was so very ill that Paul thought he was going to die. But there is no suggestion that he could have laid his hands on him and raised him up. In fact Paul was very thankful that God had spared Epaphroditus lest he should have sorrow upon sorrow by the death of his friend, but there was no hint that he might well have performed a miracle. So, I say, in the New Testament, when they work a miracle, they know it is going to happen, there is absolute certainty about it; and they also know when to withhold action, when simply they must accept the situation. They don't even say, 'If it be Thy will'. They don't need to say, 'If it is God's will', they know when it is God's will, and they speak therefore with authority. 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth', they say to the man outside the temple, 'arise and walk'. So there is this marked difference between the healings of the New Testament and the healings which are quoted today.

There is also a completeness about it. You see this in the case of Aeneas. If a man has been crippled for eight years and if he is wonderfully healed, well it will take quite some time for him to get back to normal activity. If anyone has been in hospital on your back for a long time, you know that when you get up it is extraordinarily difficult to walk; and if you get someone who has been ill and on their back for a very

long time, when they at last get up, it is almost like a child beginning to learn to walk again. But such was the completeness of this miracle that Aeneas after being healed then has no long struggle gradually getting back towards mobility again, at once he is able to get up, and indeed Peter puts it in very practical terms, 'Get up and make your bed'; get up and return to ordinary activity. With Dorcas it was the same. Peter raises her up and he presents her to the others. At once she is back in normal life and normal activity again. There is a completeness about these miracles.

One further thing about them—they direct attention towards the Lord Jesus Christ. When Peter speaks to Aeneas, 'Jesus Christ heals you', it is not Peter who has some power, it is not Peter who does the raising. Peter is simply the instrument. The One who does the healing and the raising is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. What was the purpose of it all? The purpose, as I said earlier, was to authenticate the gospel, to declare that this Jesus whom we preach to you is indeed the Son of the living God, to declare to you that this gospel is indeed the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. So you find the consequences here at Lydda and at Joppa; many turned to the Lord, they believed on the Lord; The miracles allied with the preaching made men and women aware that God was among them, that God was at work. They turned to the Lord—the phrase describes what it means to believe. It is turning from sin, turning from the sin which has held one in bondage, turning from the sin in which one has delighted, turning from the sin which has been the great crippling factor in the life, turning from that to the living Lord Jesus Christ. It means turning from self effort, turning from self righteousness, turning from every effort to improve oneself, turning from every attempt to make oneself fit for God and turning simply to the Lord Jesus. It is believing on Him, seeing Him for what He really is—the Son of God made man for us and for our salvation. It is seeing Him as the One who for our sakes went to Calvary, took our place, died in our room and stead, bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. Many people saw it. They saw it in the work which Peter wrought and they saw it in the message which Peter proclaimed, because it was not simply the action, it was the accompanying preaching. An action would simply produce wonder that such an amazing thing could happen. But Peter does not simply perform an action, he preaches the gospel, he points men and women to the Saviour. And in response to that preaching, preaching backed home by this

powerful demonstration of the miraculous working of Christ, men and women turn from their sins and they turn to the Lord.

So I say, these miracles were not performed simply for the benefit of those who more directly experienced the blessing, not simply for Aeneas who returned to normal living after those miserable years when he had been crippled and inactive, not simply for Dorcas who was raised to new life and returned to the ministry which she had been exercising so fruitfully among the believers. It was not simply for their sake, it was for the sake of others at Lydda and Joppa, others who did not know the power of God in their lives, others who did not know Christ—it was for their sake that God did this in order that they might believe. Why did Luke record it? Why did he write the history? It was in order that we who read might enter into the same experience, because of course we stand a long way from that period when God was moving in this mighty fashion. We do not see people raised from the dead today; we do not see these quite extraordinary miracles which were wrought in the gospels and the Acts. But we do not need to see them today—this surely is the point! We do not need something of that character because we have got the testimony of eyewitnesses. We can go right back to the first century, we can go to the days of the apostles and we can hear a careful historian like Luke recording in detail what happened, and so we can stand with the crowd at Lydda and at Joppa, and we can see the great things taking place. We can see Aeneas striding out from that room completely restored; we can see Dorcas back among the believers; we can see the power of God.

But we are not intended to see it, as doubtless there were some who saw it then, simply as curious onlookers, interested to see something that was quite extraordinary. People are always interested in the unusual, and the extraordinary—that is the basis on which most journalism runs; you produce the extraordinary and you put it in bold type on the front page and people are interested. They are not interested in the ordinary things. Well there were people there who doubtless were interested because it was extraordinary. But there were others who were not only interested, but they believed. And Luke has recorded it all, not simply that you and I might read and marvel at the extraordinary things that happened in the experience of the early church, but that we might see the significance of it, that we might see what it pointed to. It is

pointing to this great truth, that God has come among men; in the Person of Christ God Almighty has made Himself known. He has come from that light unapproachable which no man dare approach. He has come amongst us; He has taken our nature. He has lived our life and above all He has died for us; He has risen again, He is alive.

Many of them turned to the Lord, many of them believed on Him. The whole purpose of this narrative, the purpose of recording these miracles, is not to point to the wonderful happening but to point beyond the happening, to the Saviour, to the living triumphant Lord. And this Christ who acted in power that day through the instrumentality of Peter, is the same Lord who is still working today. We would doubtless rejoice if we saw an extraordinary healing, but there will be even greater rejoicing if some of us in this congregation today for the first time see the significance of it all, see the One to whom it is all pointing—Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the reigning Saviour, and the One who is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. To His Name be the praise for ever!

EDITORIAL (*concluded from page 146*)

We need to read widely in the Bible to obtain a balanced ration for our soul's nourishment. We need to balance our reading in other fields of Christian books and if we find ourselves concentrating almost exclusively in one area we will beware. Above all we must recall that Christ is the main theme of Scripture. Christ is the central message of all true Gospel preaching. The glory of Christ is the declared purpose of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. To know Christ is to be our supreme aim. Let us test our tendencies to unbalanced thinking and testimony by the touchstone of Christ. My study, my witness, my resistance to false doctrine—are all these directing me to Christ, and directing others through me to Him? Any other goal may seem to yield immediate and indeed exciting results, but it is in fact the devil's cul-de-sac. Let me keep my eye firmly on the honour of Christ and I may trust the Holy Spirit to maintain my spiritual balance! H.M.C.

The Eternal Blessedness of the Righteous

S. M. HOUGHTON

In the first place we would emphasise the biblical fact that blessedness, or in other words, true happiness, belongs to the righteous and to them only. It cannot possibly be the lot of the wicked, for to them, as Isaiah stresses time and again, there is no peace (48 : 22; 57 : 21); and peace *with* God (Romans 5 : 1) accompanied by the peace of God (Philippians 4 : 7) is a substantial part of the blessedness. We also emphasise that the term 'righteous' does not apply to the merely natural man who is given to contrasting himself with the outwardly wicked, and particularly so after his performance of what he would regard as a good deed. He may call himself, and be called, a Christian, but if his claim to be righteous stems from a feeling that his state of heart and his good deed demonstrate his state to be good, he is building on a foundation of sand.

The biblical assertion stares the natural man clearly and sternly in the face, 'There is none righteous, no, not one' (Romans 3 : 10). The more he feels himself to be good, the more he unfits himself for the reception of God's salvation. It is the sinner, not the righteous, whom Christ calls to repentance (Matthew 9 : 13; Mark 2 : 17; Luke 5 : 32). It is the ungodly, not the righteous, whom God justifies (Romans 4 : 5), or declares righteous. But He pronounces His verdict on the ground that 'Jesus Christ the righteous', the believer's 'Advocate with the Father' (1 John 2 : 1) has worked out a righteousness which God in grace reckons to the account of the sinner, who believes in His Son. Indeed, Christ is Himself the righteousness (1 Corinthians 1 : 30). The believer stands before God in His holy heaven in all the acceptance of the Person and the work of Christ Jesus Himself. This is the ground of his blessedness; and because of it, he in turn blesses 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ', who has blessed him 'with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ' (Ephesians 1 : 3).

In the second place we stress that the blessedness is 'eternal'.

Doubtless it points particularly to the future, to that perfection of happiness which awaits the glorified in 'Kingdom come'. By its very nature, however, the word 'eternal' speaks of timelessness and unchangeableness. It takes 'blessedness' out of the brief and sole context of time, and even space, and bespeaks its existence before time, in time, and when time shall be no more. Words entrap us as we deal with such a subject. The limitations of human thought all but engage ordinary mortals—there may be exceptions—to contemplate eternity itself as past, present and future, and thus our statements tend to become self-contradictory. The natural man, convinced of the inescapable fact that earthly life is fleeting fast, and that 'time's winged chariot' is 'hurrying near', looks at the future in terms of 'deserts of vast eternity'. Not so the spiritual man. 'Deserts' is the last word to spring to his lips in such a context, for God is his 'eternal home'. But let us keep strictly to New Testament usage.

We speak right biblically of blessings which belong to the righteous ere the world and time had existence. 'He (the Father) hath chosen us in Him (the Son),' says the apostle, 'before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love' (Ephesians 1 : 4). He adds much else. Let an English poet take up the strain:

'Blessings abound where'er He reigns,
The prisoner leaps to lose his chains,
The weary find eternal rest,
And all the sons of want are blest.'

Watts speaks with true vision and with poetic aptness. The Christian life, in its dateless origin, in its time aspect, and in its 'pleasures for evermore' at the right hand of God, is pre-eminently a blessed life. It is incomparable. On earth it knows its sorrows, temptations, distresses and persecutions, its doubts and its fears; but 'fulness of joy' is its outcome and its goal. Ahead is the 'prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 3 : 14). Already our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3 : 20). Here and now we are come 'unto Mount Sion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem'. We keep company with myriads of angels and first-born-ones, written in heaven (Hebrews 12 : 22-23). Ahead lie the pearly gates. The four-square city is already within the spirit's view. Shortly there will be the everlasting raptures and rejoicings. The foresight of what is yet to be, even now thrills the expectant soul. The not-so-distant music sounding out from the golden bells of our glorious High Priest catches

the ear amid all the thousand voices of earth. We hear His voice, 'Behold, I come quickly (soon)'. We reply, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus'.

Blessedness has glorious content. Who would not share it in the fast-approaching day? And yet the fact is that to none but the righteous are such events, and is such company, desirable. To the ungodly man, who despises Christian blessedness on earth, the bliss and society and activities of heaven would be painful beyond expression. Each man goes to 'his own place', the place for which he is fitted and which is fitted for him. 'Say ye to the righteous that it shall be well with him. . . . Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him.' So said Isaiah (3 : 10-11), and to these solemn sentences of bliss and woe let all say 'Amen'.

We fix our chief attention at this point on the future and the futurity of the blessedness of the righteous, and we note, first, that their blessedness is of and from the Father. 'Come, ye blessed of my Father' (Matthew 25 : 34). It was He who sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. The Son of God at His second coming (having accomplished a perfect redemptive work at His first coming) sets His sheep on His right hand, and then speaks to them the word that He so often used during His ministry on earth—'COME'. He has fulfilled on their behalf all His Father's good pleasure. They by grace have believed His gospel to the saving of their souls. They are not of those who have drawn back unto perdition (Hebrews 10 : 39). Their reward is an eternal welcome and an eternal inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled and unfading. For this they have been kept, and made ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1 : 4-5). And at the precise moment when they hear 'the welcome voice' and enter into possession of their inheritance, their Lord reminds them that the Kingdom they receive has been prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25 : 34). A marvellous rainbow arch of blessing spans what the prophet Micah describes as 'the days of eternity' (5 : 2 Marg.). The Lord, through whom all blessings come to the righteous, is well called the 'King of the ages', or 'of eternity' ('the King eternal': 1 Timothy 1 : 17).

Here it seems well to strike a note of caution and warning. There are some who, in handling Matthew chapter 25 (the sheep and goats chapter) argue that the sheep are accepted as righteous by God on the ground of the merit of their good works—the giving of food and drink to the destitute, the

receiving of the stranger, the clothing of the naked, the visiting of the sick, the caring for the prisoner. But we notice that, when they receive their Lord's well-done for these things, they lay claim to no accruing merit (verses 37-39). On the contrary, the goats claim to have served the Lord by such works. It must be well understood that, while believers bring forth 'good works' to the glory of God, their salvation is the ground, not the consequences of, those works; the root, not the fruit. The sequence is made crystal clear in many scriptures. We quote from one only: 'By grace are ye saved, through faith . . . not of works . . . created *unto* good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them' (Ephesians 2 : 8-10).

In the abounding mercy of God the good works of the righteous will be rewarded. 'God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love which ye have showed towards His Name' (Hebrews 6 : 10), and beyond all doubt they may be accounted a part of the blessedness. But it is what their Lord has done for them rather than what they have done for their Lord that constitutes bliss. The eternal note of joy runs, 'He (the Lord) hath done all things well'. It is 'unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood' that the song resounds through the many mansions. Blessedness is all from Him: 'of Him, through Him and unto Him: to whom be glory for ever' (Romans 11 : 36).

One aspect of the eternal blessedness of the righteous—an aspect, perhaps, which moves them more than any other—is that they will be with their Lord where He is. It is a guaranteed blessing: ' . . . that where I am, there ye may be also' (John 14 : 3). The apostolic testimony sounds the same assured note: 'So shall we ever be with the Lord' (1 Thessalonians 4 : 17.) Hence the believer's comfort when death invades the Christian family. The ability to sing, 'For ever with the Lord; Amen, so let it be; life from the dead is in that word; 'tis immortality', is proof of the comfort. The Christian has 'songs in the night'. The Book of Job informs us that God 'gives them, and experience confirms the good word (35 : 10). If to be on earth without the physical sight of Christ, 'yet believing', is capable of yielding 'joy unspeakable and full of glory' as a present experience—and believers do at times enjoy such flights of rapture—what will be the measure of the joy of seeing Him face to face and of knowing even as we are known?

'What will it be to dwell above,
And with the Lord of Glory reign?'

sang Joseph Swain, the 18th-century Baptist preacher of Walworth. Wisely he does not attempt an answer to his own query, except in the words,

‘No heart can tell, no tongue explain,
What joy ’twill be with Christ to reign.’

Nor can any living Christian supply a more adequate answer. Yet we know that God has revealed something to us by His Spirit of the length and breadth, the height and depth, of eternal bliss (1 Corinthians 2 : 10), despite the truth that eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for them that love Him. The entire matter belongs to ‘the deep things of God’ and the Spirit of God alone is competent to search it.

The Christian has a striking illustration of the fact that his blessedness is eternal, in the expression ‘eternal life’. We take the words on our lips glibly enough, but their content is indescribably great. ‘I give unto my sheep eternal life’, said the Good Shepherd to the believer’s foes (John 10 : 28). How slow is the believer oftentimes to take the blessed truth home to himself! We live, most of us, at ‘a poor dying rate’, lamentably indifferent to the wonders of the life within our souls. Too much we conform to Bunyan’s description of the man with the muckrake who ‘could look no way but downwards’, blissfully unaware (in his own way) of the celestial crown held by ‘One over his head’. Even the best of men live but on ‘spending money’, on the foretaste of glory, on the mercy-drops of grace. Shortly we shall be in ‘the better country, that is, an heavenly’. As Builder and Maker, God has prepared for the righteous ‘a city with foundations’. If it were not so—and the expression we use is warranted, *mirabile dictu*, by Scripture itself—He would be ashamed to be called our God (Hebrews 11 : 16). On our part, let us confess His blessed name unashamedly, and reckon it all joy if we are counted worthy to suffer present shame for His Name (Acts 5 : 41).

J. C. RYLE

Bishop of Liverpool

M. SMOUT

(continued from previous issue)

With the weight of work in Liverpool, Ryle was not as free to pursue outside activities as he had been in Suffolk. Besides this he was now an old man and failing health prevented too much travelling. Considering this, it is remarkable in how many matters outside the diocese he managed to maintain an interest. During the first ten years of his episcopate he continued to attend Church Congresses. His first appearance as a bishop was at the Leicester Congress in 1880 where he spoke at the working-men's meeting. He was also on the platform two years later at Derby, when his subject was 'Evangelistic work at home'. Again he was called on to speak at the working-men's meeting. At Wakefield in 1886 his paper on the subject of the Church in the country cast his mind back to his long years of country ministry. At Hull in 1890 we find him intervening in the discussions on foreign missions and also on the suggestion, which he opposed, that brotherhoods should be formed to work in working-class parishes. This was the final time he made any contribution to Congress.

Being now in the northern province, Ryle became a regular attender at York Convocation, and took part in the various discussions in the Upper House. Even as late as 1898 he could be found there riding his old hobby-horse of the place of the laity in the government and work of the church. He also continued as much as possible to support those societies and institutions which had been his life-long interest, even if he did not speak quite so frequently as before. For instance, it was not until 1889 that he made his first appearance since becoming bishop at the Islington Clerical Conference, where he spoke about the controversies over Holy Communion.

The Church Pastoral Aid Society continued to claim his attention. He occasionally gave the annual sermon as at St. Dunstan's, Fleet Street, in 1882, and supported it locally in Liverpool. Speaking at a Liverpool meeting in 1888, he asserted that 'Liverpool does not want pulpit men. We want pastors'. His interest in the theological colleges extended now to the London College of Divinity situated at Highbury. In 1884 he was called on to preach the memorial sermon for Dr. Boulton,

the first principal, whom Ryle summed up as 'a well balanced, well proportioned theologian, drawing all his creed from the Scriptures, of a holy and consistent life'. His concluding prayer was 'Let us pray for Highbury that . . . the light kindled there may never burn down and never be extinguished'.

Associations with the Church Missionary Society remained very close, and he kept a fatherly eye on all that happened in connection with that society. In 1893 he was asked by J. S. Hill, bishop designate of Western Equatorial Africa, to present himself and two assistant African bishops at the consecration service at St. Paul's. Ryle was somewhat perturbed because, besides knowing that he was to be at St. Paul's on the 29th June, 'I have not received the slightest official information from any quarter about proceedings, and that, to say the least, is odd'. He attended the May meeting as often as he was able, although writing to say he was coming to the 1894 meeting he characteristically added 'at my age the "I will" is always uncertain'. Ryle did his best to raise funds for the society in Liverpool. Once he held a drawing-room meeting at his palace in an effort to attract 'the ladies of our Liverpool upper ten thousand who would not attend a town meeting'. The meeting raised £60.

The bishop kept an eye, too, on the policies of the C.M.S. and was not slow to move into action when he noted anything which he felt might be out of line with the foundation principles of the society. He was disturbed to hear a report of a proposed united 'dismissal' service for missionaries going out with the C.M.S. and with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, which was of High Church sympathies. Ryle wrote to Headquarters to enquire whether this was true. If it was, he felt it would do great harm, for 'to pray together for blessing on missionaries is one thing' but 'to proclaim by a public act that men trained on two different systems of principles are equally deserving of confidence is quite another'. He was only pacified by the C.M.S. Secretary's reply that, in fact, the suggestion came from some of the bishops. The C.M.S. itself would leave it to the discretion of their missionaries whether they took part or not, but would still continue to hold their own separate valedictory services.

On the world scene, Ryle applauded the fact in 1896 that the C.M.S. refused to give in to the pressure of some on the episcopal bench to appoint a non-evangelical as Bishop of Osaka and insisted on their own choice, but at the end of the following year he complained bitterly about the appointment of the liberal Bishop Awdry in Japan. He felt that bishops like

Awdry 'write and speak like men up in a balloon who do not know what is going on upon earth'. He placed the blame on the home bishops for finding men like Awdry. He declared that such an appointment 'shakes my confidence in their wisdom and judgment to the very foundation' . . . 'From such bishops good Lord deliver us'. Just over a year before his death, Ryle received an open letter from T. J. Gaster, Vicar of All Saints, Camberwell, which was published in the *Rock* and the *English Churchman*. Gaster was complaining that the C.M.S. Younger Clergy Union had invited all clergy, not just evangelicals, to one of their meetings. Ryle told the C.M.S. Secretary not to worry about it since he knew Gaster of old, and soon he received a letter from C. N. Coulthard, the President of the Younger Clergy Union, giving a satisfactory explanation of what had happened.

Ryle was also a regular attender at the Pan-Anglican Conferences held at Lambeth Palace, to which came Anglican bishops from all over the world. He missed the 1897 gathering through illness, but his absence in 1888 had caused something of a controversy. A letter appeared in the *Times* written by Ryle from Pitlochry, dissenting from the encyclical drawn up by the Conference. It was a statement which Ryle felt gave an impression of false unity. He complained that 'I myself for one had no voice or hand in drawing up the encyclical. I saw no rough draft of it after it was drawn up. I never read a line of it before it appeared in the columns of the *Times*. In short, I must disclaim any responsibility for its contents'. Therefore the encyclical was not 'the united and harmonious voice of all bishops of the Anglican Communion'. Ryle would have liked the deep-lying differences in the Anglican Church to be honestly stated instead of papered over. To have done so would have been to have 'greatly strengthened the Church of England and cheered the hearts of myriads of loyal Churchmen'. The Archbishop of Canterbury was quick to reply that only 8 out of 145 bishops were absent when the encyclical was drawn up. He then added a little sarcastically that 'we did not unfortunately have the advantage of his (Ryle's) presence for co-operation and criticism on that day'. He felt it was a pity that any suggestions Ryle might have had about adding additional sentences to the encyclical were not made to the Conference rather than after it. This prompted a Liverpool paper to entitle an article on the disagreement 'Our Bishop Ryle'd'! And it seems that he certainly was. Although he was right to have made public his dissent from the encyclical, it was not wise of Ryle to complain that he had not been consulted, in

view of the fact that he was not present at Lambeth. His reply to the Archbishop's statement was the rather weak one that he had been 'detained in Liverpool by pressing diocesan engagements'.

As we shall see later, his main interest in politics was when it was concerned with religious matters. He made his voice heard especially on matters concerning ritual and patronage, and concerned himself in the Colenso affair. In 1884 he became one of the 26 bishops with a seat in the House of Lords, but he was never very interested in its proceedings. He never made a speech, voted only occasionally and rather grudgingly took his turn as Chaplain.

The bishop's lack of interest in world affairs is shown by the fact that he never travelled abroad. He could sometimes be aroused to express his feelings, as in a letter which he sent in 1882 to the Liverpool Branch of the Anglo-Jewish Association expressing his disgust at the way in which Jews were being persecuted in some parts of Russia. He wrote, 'I cannot bring myself to believe that the Russian government is aware of all that has happened or thoroughly grasps the feeling of abhorrence with which the recent events in some of the Czar's dominions is regarded throughout the civilised world. I trust, however, that all the Christian men in England will raise a loud cry of remonstrance and enter a moral protest against the treatment to which so many unhappy Jews have been subjected'.

He was always ready to take an opportunity to criticise Gladstone and was widely criticised himself in 1885 for blaming the Government for its lack of help for General Gordon in the Sudan. 'The policy of the Government has been one of fumbling and fumbling and fumbling,' grumbled Ryle. This he considered a punishment for the nation's past sins. To do this, 'God need not send floods, earthquakes or pestilence. He could fill our rulers' minds with folly and make them do stupid things'. It was generally considered that the bishop's political pronouncements ought not to be taken too seriously.

Added to the pressure of work was the constant criticism which the bishop had to face, both from the Liverpool and the national press. The most vigorous local attacks came from the *Liberal Review*, which by nature was not enamoured by things Anglican. Even before Ryle arrived in Liverpool, the attack began. 'Although he is said to have become more charitable and broad in his sympathies of late years, we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that his antecedents are by no means of a

promising kind. He belongs to the "most straitest sect" of the Established Church. He has been a member hitherto of the Church Persecution Association Ltd.' After a year or so of the bishop's stay, the paper concluded that 'the importance of the bishop's utterances is usually in inverse proportion to their length'. On similar lines the *Review* complained that 'the Bishop of Liverpool, as usual, said a great deal at the Annual Meeting of the Liverpool Diocesan Church Aid Society on Tuesday which, if he only performed part of it, would be better for himself and the whole diocese'. It was not only his words which the *Review* found annoying, but what they felt was his failure in the common courtesies of life. One such time was when he arrived at St. George's Hall for the opening meeting of the new University. He was alleged to have left his wife and one of her friends in the carriage and strode into the hall 'with that majestic bearing which has by this time become familiar'. Another complaint was about his way of shaking hands with two fingers, 'which many of his acquaintances are threatening to hook in two of theirs in order to suggest by this broad hint that the extension of two digits is not felt to be a sufficiently hearty greeting by persons who are eligible to be favoured with a touch of the episcopal hand'. Ryle's manners were again put under the microscope during a visit of Royalty to Liverpool in 1886. The bishop and his wife were invited to a reception at the Town Hall. When the royal procession came into view outside, Ryle rushed on to the balcony. His wife tried to follow him and nearly got guillotined by a window sash. At last, with her husband's help, she got on to the balcony and the crowd below roared 'The bishop's got his missus through'. These and similar remarks gave the impression that the paper's criticism was carping, and that it was impossible for Ryle to do anything good in their eyes. The critics' defence was that the Bishop's rudeness ought to be met by a similar rudeness, for 'there is no use tickling with the feather of a humming bird the epidermis of a rhinoceros'.

The *Review* dealt in a type of sarcasm which was very much in vogue at the end of the century. When there was a large fire near to the palace, it reported that the bishop 'might have been observed gazing at the fire clad in little else than his episcopal nightgown. For some time John Charles remained on view, not exactly naked but certainly—like Adam and Eve—not ashamed. At last it seemed to strike him that as first Bishop of Liverpool his position hardly consorted with his dignity and he withdrew'. The ultimate in this line of attack

was reached when a mock letter was printed as from Ryle himself, giving reasons why he should get the prize for being the greatest man in Liverpool.

- '1. I have written a series of tracts which are unrivalled for the beauty of their diction and their sound evangelical truth.
- '2. I was admired by that splendid and never-to-be-forgotten statesman, Lord Beaconsfield.
- '3. I have won the affection and esteem of the ladies—witness the number I have led to the hymeneal altar.
- '4. I am Bishop of Liverpool—the *first* Bishop of Liverpool.
- '5. My house in Abercromby Square is called a palace. I take precedence wherever I go; there are clergymen who would cheerfully lick the dust off my shoes. I am able to dispense twaddle and smiles at tea parties in a manner not to be beaten.
- '6. As I walk along, arrayed in my gorgeous vestment and wearing my sweet expression, I look the handsomest and most muscular Christian to be found for a hundred miles around.'

Another Liverpool paper composed a satirical song called 'The First Lord Bishop of Liverpool's Song' to one of the tunes from Gilbert and Sullivan's 'H.M.S. Pinafore', beginning

'At writing tracts I acquired such note,
That they put me into a living remote,
And that rustic living—tame I ween—
Was the only kind of life I had ever seen,
But that kind of life fully qualifies me
To be the "first bishop" of this great big see.'

This abusive criticism continued to the end, although as his powers failed it toned down somewhat. By 1899 the new *Liverpool Review* was saying the same things a trifle more kindly. 'Can it be that his Lordship is a wee bit too conscious of his position, and a trifle too jealous of his personal dignity? It may be, too, that although his sermons and addresses are always attuned to the popular ear, his carriage and demeanour do not harmonise with his words; that, in a word, his being is not sympathetic.'

This local criticism probably hurt Ryle more than that which came from outside Liverpool. Of course, he was constantly under attack during the years of the Bell-Cox persecution, but even small actions of his did not escape the attention

of the Church press, and especially of the *Church Times*, the organ of the High Church party. When St. Chad's, Everton, was consecrated in 1885, that paper got hold of a story that Ryle had threatened not to consecrate unless the incumbent, J. W. Rhodes, promised not to hold daily services in a side aisle to avoid having to heat the whole church during winter. The story was untrue, because the bishop had written to Rhodes earlier saying, 'I will *not* insist on my objection to daily prayer being said in any other place than the reading desk'. When Rhodes informed Ryle that the *Church Times* had been getting at him, Ryle replied, 'I never see the *Church Times*. I am so accustomed to deliberate and evidently intentional misrepresentation in its columns that I care little for what it may have said about me and St. Chad's'. Rhodes wrote to the *Church Times*, 'I cannot imagine how you have been misled into stating that the incident caused a painful feeling here; this is not the case, as it was merely temporary, and was known to very few persons'.

If he had enemies who had no time for him, Ryle also had many friends. As we have seen, he felt it one of his primary tasks to look after the interests of his clergy. They responded to his interest and concern. He believed in meeting those under his care as often as possible. This was one of the reasons why, in 1881, he started diocesan conferences, which were open to every licensed clergyman and elected lay representative. These conferences lasted two days and, besides being an opportunity to discuss business, made an opportunity for the bishop to have personal contact with the conference members.

Every year, a 'quiet day' was held at St. Barnabas' Mission Hall in St. Nathaniel's parish for those who had been recently ordained by the bishop. The reason for holding it in a mission hall was simply that there was no room big enough in the palace. 'Nothing could be more delightful,' commented Canon Hobson, 'than the general loving manner of the bishop, or more helpful than his wise fatherly counsel.' He was loved by many of his clergy, and he in turn had a deep affection for them. When Maïor Lester died three years after Ryle himself, the late bishop's daughter wrote to express her regret at the passing of a clergyman 'for whom her dear father had a very great respect and admiration'.

Of all his clerical friends, Ryle's closest was, without doubt, Richard Hobson, whom he regarded as the 'model parochial clergyman'. It would be easy to overrate Hobson in comparing him with other clergy in Liverpool. Firstly, we know a lot about him because he left behind him a written account of his

parish, which others did not. Secondly, Hobson's teaching, thinking and methods were so akin to those of his bishop that he was, in a sense, Ryle incarnate as a parochial city clergyman. But having said that, nothing can take away the fact that he did a great work in his parish. Not only did he pack the church Sunday by Sunday, but eventually he had three mission halls (including one where the services were taken in Welsh) in operation, a dozen men in constant training as evangelists and 200 lay helpers. Hobson was already well entrenched in his parish when Ryle became bishop. He was delighted at the appointment, but never thought for a moment, at that stage, how close the bishop's relationships with the parish would be. It was not long, however, before Hobson was speaking up in defence of Ryle. When a Jesuit priest challenged Ryle about some remarks the bishop had made about the Virgin Mary, Hobson offered £300, even if it meant selling his books, if the priest could give a satisfactory reply. At a public lunch a little later, which both Ryle and Hobson were attending, Ryle leant over and enquired, 'Hobson, have you sold your books yet?'. This was the first time that the two men ever spoke together.

Ryle paid his first visit to St. Nathaniel's in 1881. It was to be the first of many. After preaching on behalf of the Irish Church Missions, he turned to Hobson in the vestry and commented, 'I make much of hands, and I conclude that five out of every six of your communicants are working men'. Then he added, 'I wish to preach in this church every six months'. From that time, in effect, St. Nathaniel's became Ryle's parish church. He gave as his reason that he liked the atmosphere of the church, whereas that of many left him cold. Although he visited St. Nathaniel's on many occasions, he always went without fail on the first Sunday of the New Year and Whit Sunday. Two pews were allocated to the bishop's servants, and Hobson gave up his own pew for the use of the bishop and his family. Hobson wondered why Ryle had become so attached to the church and could only conclude it was because of 'the pure Gospel, a simple hearty service, and the manifest power of the Holy Spirit working in our midst'. The bishop confirmed this conclusion in part by saying, at the opening of the parish hall, 'Don't forget the lining of the pulpit; the pulpit of St. Nathaniel's is well lined'.

At the Derby Congress of 1882, Ryle held up St. Nathaniel's as an example of how the masses could be brought into the churches. His statements that there were 800 communicants and no 'house of ill-fame' in the parish were challenged, but Hobson backed him up by proving that these indeed were the

facts of the matter. He afterwards told Ryle that he was afraid that the bishop's praise of the church had created jealousy. Ryle simply replied, 'I knew it would, don't mind it, live it down'. The following year the bishop tried to persuade Hobson to move to a church in Garston, about five miles away. The result was that a deputation of men from the church arrived at the palace asking for an audience with Ryle. Later the bishop told Hobson, 'When I heard there were a number of men at my door waiting to see me, I suspected what they were about. I saw and heard them and I think if I had not agreed to your withdrawal, they would have knocked my head off'. Ryle continued to help Hobson in every practical way possible. He would go with the vicar to the local coal yards to speak to the men, and preached at the church on numerous occasions. Once, some missionary boxes were stolen from the church, so he gave Hobson a safe to keep them in. Since the parish was too small to qualify for a grant from the Church Pastoral Aid Society, it was Ryle who was instrumental in adding the 2,500 people to it from another parish which was necessary to qualify. So close was the bishop's interest in the affairs of St. Nathaniel's that when the new mission hall was opened, he commented, 'I might have been considered clerk of the works, having paid it 42 visits during its erection'. In 1895 Hobson was offered a canonry by Ryle, which he accepted. Ryle gave as his reason that 'I should like to leave you Canon Hobson when I leave this world'. A serious breakdown in health two years later caused Hobson to go to the Canaries to convalesce. The bishop wrote to him regularly. He counselled Hobson, 'God sometimes requires us to do less that we may last the longer and do more', and again, 'It will do your believing people good, that they may learn to depend on Christ and not on Hobson'.

Although this friendship with Hobson was a unique one, many of the clergy in the diocese had reason at one time or another to be grateful for their bishop's interest in their welfare. This was expressed in an illuminated address given to him on his eightieth birthday, which expressed 'our warm appreciation of your Lordship's personal work, your kindly feeling with and for us in times of sorrow and joy alike, and your active interest in all that makes for the well-being of the community'.

During the last ten years especially, Ryle began to rely more than ever on his son Herbert, especially after the death of the bishop's wife in 1889, which was a body-blow to him. The two men remained close friends even though in 1887 Herbert

ceased to be his father's examining chaplain because of his change in theological position. He was now a leader of the school of biblical criticism, becoming widely known through his book on Genesis. Once he wrote to a friend, whilst staying at the palace, 'I write in a land where . . . German criticism has not obtained much foothold, even in the bookshelves'. But the bishop did not allow this to affect their friendship. Herbert was able to say, 'Much as he differed from me in many points, he never suffered the shadow of a difference to come between us in the intimacy of our affection and since the time I went to school at the age of nine and a half I never received from him a harsh word. And that sense of companionship grew between us until the rarity of meeting one another caused that growth to cease and simply left us supremely happy to meet and to be together'.

In 1882 Herbert got engaged. His father was a little concerned because he had not met his future daughter-in-law. But he consoled himself, 'Herbert is a sensible fellow, and I do not think he would choose a fool—or an unbeliever or a papist—or one who is not a lady'. Eventually when the marriage took place in August 1883 at Holy Trinity, Marylebone, the bishop took the service. Three years later, on a visit to Liverpool, Herbert heard his father preach at an evening communion service at St. Nathaniel's, when there were 409 communicants and 'the majority quite poor people'.

Ryle was always ready to help his son in a practical way, once sending him £100 in a time of trouble and on another occasion offering him £500 free of interest to help him out of a spot. They confided in each other, Herbert being told by his father that he had come away from a bishop's meeting vexed and annoyed to such an extent that 'I am not at all disposed to go up again to London for one night for such a waste of time'. The friendship was a deep one that presented in many ways a clearer picture of the true Ryle that lay underneath the harsh exterior than anything else. This closeness is illustrated by an entry in Herbert's diary 16 years after his father's death. 'The centenary of my dear old Father's birthday. How continually one's thoughts go back to him.'

The offers which the bishop made of financial help to his son were not confined to his family alone. He was known to be a man of a 'generous purse', ready to help wherever there was a need. For example, at the end of the Bell-Cox affair, he contributed £25 to help Hakes pay his costs. Another time he donated £50 towards a new clock on the tower of St.

Nathaniel's. He gave £25 towards St. Chad's, Everton, at its consecration and donated towards other new churches in the diocese. He also supported financially many of the charities in the city. It was once said of him that there was scarcely a movement in any parish which he had not contributed towards, usually so quietly that hardly anyone knew about it.

Although his time was full with so many different matters, Ryle still managed to find time for some writing, even though it was confined mainly to books of sermons. 'The Upper Room' was published in 1888, and two years later 'Light from Old Times', a survey of Church of England leaders from the past, appeared. Neither of these was as important as 'Principles for Churchmen' (1884), which was an examination of the doctrine of Evangelicals and their position within the Church of England. Ryle kept in touch with the world at large by taking three daily newspapers, which he read at breakfast time. He also looked after his body as well as his mind. His cricketing days were now well behind him, but to keep fit he took a daily walk on the landing-stage. He stopped and spoke with anyone he met in the street on the way and would discuss the Bible with any believers he met. On parting from them he would place his hand on their shoulder and say, 'Always keep looking up'. He looked forward to his annual holidays, his favourite spots being Pitlochry in Scotland, Lowestoft and Keswick. Although he had never taken any part in the Convention at the latter place, he appeared on the platform when Moody spoke there at an unplanned meeting in 1892.

One of his earliest holidays as bishop had been a few days in January 1881 revisiting his home town of Macclesfield. He and Mrs. Ryle were the guests of Rev. John Thorneycroft, of Thorneycroft Hall. This was a nostalgic journey, especially when he went to the Sunderland Street Chapel to inspect a tablet in memory of his grandfather, which he had cleaned at his own expense. To the inscription the bishop had added, 'This tablet cleaned and renovated in the year 1880 by John Charles Ryle, first Bishop of Liverpool, in token of his deep respect for the memory of his grandfather, John Ryle, and for the memory of his grandfather's friend, John Wesley'. Two years later Ryle donated the land for a Burial Ground for St. George's Church.

During his stays in the Keswick area, Ryle often preached at the local churches. In 1876 some ultra-Protestants had bitterly complained because they had found him preaching at Crosthwaite Parish Church in a surplice instead of the usual Protestant black gown.

On visits to Pitlochry, Ryle went to the Church of Scotland kirk rather than to the Episcopal Church. There were two reasons for doing this. Firstly, the Church of Scotland was the church of the nation and he felt this was where he ought to worship in Scotland. He felt no obligation to go to the episcopal church merely because it had bishops as the Church of England did. He was unmoved by the complaint of an Episcopalian about 'Bishop Ryle who rusticates in our Perthshire Highlands and preaches in the Geneva toga in the parish kirk of Pitlochry, preferring this sort of thing to legitimate episcopacy'. Secondly, Ryle could not forget that the episcopal church refused to accept the judgment in the Gorham case which allowed the Evangelicals' doctrine of baptism to be permissible in the Church of England. He wrote to the Vicar of Holy Trinity, Pitlochry, that 'so long as the Synodical Declaration of your church . . . regarding the Gorham Judgment is not withdrawn or cancelled' he would find 'the difficulty in worshipping in the Scottish Episcopal Church insuperable'. But Ryle did not confine himself to churches, for a university professor remembered him preaching in a barn in Scotland 'and being profoundly impressed both by his eloquence and ability'.

During one of his holidays in Keswick, Ryle and his daughter, who came to live with him after his wife's death, renewed their acquaintance with Catherine Marsh. She recorded, 'Before we left he prayed with us such a patriarchal, patriotic and personal prayer'.

It is easy to forget that when Ryle became Bishop of Liverpool in 1880 he was 64 years of age. It is a testimony to his amazing physical strength that he was able to serve the diocese for twenty years. Gradually this strength began to fail. When Mrs. Ryle died and was buried in Childwall Churchyard at a service attended by 2,000 mourners, the rumour went round that he might retire. At the diocesan conference of that year he said that, because of the death of his wife, he might either have to resign or get a suffragan. In the event, Bishop Royston later arrived as assistant, but Ryle must have been very near to giving up. Added to this personal loss came a serious illness a few years later from which he recovered to the extent of being able to write to Herbert, 'I am a wonder to myself in my ability to do so much without fatigue'. But as time went on it became obvious that he could not carry on for very much longer. In April 1899 he chaired a centenary meeting of the Church Missionary Society at the Queen's Hall, and in the summer went to Lowestoft for a rest. From then on he

took no part in any public gatherings. He had continued his visits to St. Nathaniel's as long as he could. Perhaps he had had a premonition of the end when the previous year he had been looking at a memorial stone in the church to a layman who had served for 24 years. He had turned to Hobson, with the tears flowing down his face, and said, 'You may thank God you had such a man as that for 24 years'. Early in 1899 he preached his last sermon at St. Nathaniel's and held his last 'Presbyter's Party'. In May he preached at St. Silas', Toxteth, for his old friend Canon Woodward. His sermon was on behalf of the Church Missionary Society, and although he was evidently a sick man, he preached with all his old power. He told the congregation that a nurse had given him a postal order for 23s. to pass on to the society.

From the summer of 1899 onwards, Ryle was hardly fit for work and most of his duties were taken over by Bishop Royston. In October he summoned himself for a final effort to ordain privately in St. Peter's, P. S. Margoliouth, who was Professor of Arabic at Oxford. Around this time, while he was once more at Lowestoft, he was visited by Herbert, who found his father 'so evidently enfeebled in step, hearing and memory'. He advised him to resign. Ryle, 'evidently pleased that the suggestion should come from another, almost welcomed it'. Within 24 hours he had made up his mind to resign. He wrote to the Archbishop of York of his intention to do this as from 1st March 1900. From then on most of his time was spent in bed. On Christmas Day he managed to get to St. Nathaniel's to take communion. Let Canon Hobson recall the scene in his own words. 'As we were about to commence the 11 o'clock service on Christmas Day a tap was heard at the vestry entrance to the church, and on the door being opened, to our utter amazement, there was the bishop, quite bent, with his family, including the present Bishop of Winchester (Herbert). They all sat in the vicar's pew. The bishop, as was his custom, sat in the corner where good Mrs. Ryle used to sit. . . . At the Sacrament, the bishop came to the rail, followed by his children, who knelt on either side of him. For a moment I felt almost overcome, which he must have perceived for, looking up at me, he said softly, "Go on". They remained till the congregation had gone, when I went to him. He reached out his poor hand and drew me to him, saying, "This is the last time; God bless you; we shall meet in heaven". The big tears trickled down his furrowed cheeks.' As he left the church, Ryle turned to the 82-year-old sexton and said, 'Well, my old friend, you have not gone to heaven yet?' 'No, my lord,' came

the reply. 'Well,' went on the bishop, 'you may be sure so long as there is anything for us to do, God will leave us here to do it.'

In January 1900 he said his farewell to Charles Garrett, a Liverpool Wesleyan minister, who had written to him about his retirement. Ryle referred to John Wesley, saying, 'I learned to respect him when I was only a boy, and I continue my feelings towards him at the age of 83'. Then he sadly ended, 'We shall probably not meet much more in this world, but I shall not forget you, and live in the hope that we shall meet to part no more in the world to come, where there is no death, and where there will be no tears'. In the same month Canon Hobson had his last interview with his bishop. The Canon found him looking bright and said how happy they all had been to see him at St. Nathaniel's on Christmas Day. Ryle replied, 'Yes, I said to my children "Let us go to St. Nathaniel's this morning, for I am sure we will be welcome there"'. Then suddenly he said, 'I have been thinking what memento you might like to have of me. I have thought you would like to have my Bible which I have been using on my study table for over 50 years'. Hobson thanked him for the gift. Then Ryle took his pen and wrote at the front of the Bible.

Given to Richard Hobson

by

John Charles Ryle,

First Bishop of Liverpool.

With very much Christian Love.

22nd January 1900.

Handing it to Hobson, he quietly said, 'Now, let us have a parting prayer'.

On 1st February, Ryle published his farewell to the diocese. He asked forgiveness for his imperfections, pleading the fact that he was 64 years of age when he arrived 'and not a young man'. He spoke from his heart when he said that it would be hard for him to leave Liverpool. 'I shall never forget you. I had ventured to hope that I might be allowed to end my days near the Mersey, and to die in harness. But God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, and He has gradually taught me by failing health that the huge population of this diocese requires a younger and stronger bishop.' A month later he did make way for that younger man. His clergy presented an address to him expressing the belief that 'nothing will afford you truer joy or more lasting satisfaction than to be permitted to witness,

though from a distance, the strengthening of diocesan life and activity, and the extension of the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the sphere of your own more recent labours'. But it was not to be, and the old bishop went off to his beloved Lowestoft to pass what were to be the final few weeks of his life.

Lowestoft was the place the bishop had chosen to spend his retirement along with his unmarried daughter. He had learned to love the Suffolk seaside town during his time at Helmingham, so it was appropriate that he should name the house he was to live in 'Helmingham House'. There were still people living at Lowestoft to whom he had become a familiar figure as he energetically strode the streets during the summers of earlier days. But things were to be different now, for he was an old and a dying man.

The Ryles were due to arrive in Lowestoft on the 6th March, but the day before the old man was taken ill again. It was the middle of the month before they eventually arrived. The house was a pleasant one overlooking the North Sea, but Ryle was in no condition to appreciate the view. Apart from the occasional carriage outing, he stayed indoors. He slept badly and did not want to talk. He was obviously weakening.

The end came suddenly. It was 9th June, a Saturday evening, when the doctor was called in. He found Ryle partly unconscious. By the following morning his temperature was higher and his daughter was constantly by his bedside. His sons were sent a telegram to come immediately. Only Herbert, not far away in Cambridge, arrived in time. At 2.15 on the Sunday afternoon, the first Bishop of Liverpool went to be with his Lord. Herbert wrote, 'The sudden blow—however long expected—comes suddenly and is a blow to which nothing can be compared . . . I to whom it was an intense stimulus to think of pleasing my father as a boy and a young man, feel how greatly he has always filled up the picture of life'.

The news was slow to filter back to Liverpool, probably because it was a Sunday and communications were slow. By evening the sad news was still not known, for the new Bishop Chavasse made no reference to it preaching at Holy Trinity, St. Anne's Street, nor did the clergy at St. Peter's. Eventually, late in the evening, the news arrived. Ryle is dead.

The following Wednesday morning, early, a small crowd gathered at Lowestoft station to pay their last respects. They

only wished that the old bishop had been able to enjoy his retirement amongst them for a little longer. The huge oak panelled coffin was put in a special funeral car attached to the 7.57 a.m. train to Liverpool. On the coffin was the simple inscription, 'The Right Reverend John Charles Ryle, D.D., born 10th May 1816, died 10th June 1900. First Bishop of Liverpool. Consecrated St. Barnabas Day, 11th June 1880, Resigned 1st March 1900'. Inside the coffin had been placed Ryle's Bible which he had had for 50 years. This had been his express wish, for Canon Hobson had sometimes 'heard him say, referring to his well-worn little preaching Bible, that as the sword of an officer is buried with him, so he expected his sword, the Bible he used in preaching, to be buried with him'. Late in the afternoon the coffin was taken from Lime Street Station and placed overnight in the ancient parish church of 'All Saints', Childwall, a few miles from the city centre. There were no mourners yet. Only Bishop Royston, the vicar, was there to receive the coffin. That evening the three Ryle sons and his daughter arrived in Liverpool.

The ivy-clad church stood on the slope of a hill, looking out south over the Mersey and into Cheshire. The bishop had known it well, for he had visited the grave of his wife in the churchyard every week since she died. The morning of the funeral dawned grey and drizzly, but by the afternoon the weather had brightened up and people in their thousands came out from Liverpool in the special trains. As the muffled bells rang, the funeral procession met the mourners at the entrance to the churchyard. It was three o'clock. The service was a simple one. Archdeacon Taylor read the first lesson from Psalm 90. 'Rock of Ages', Ryle's favourite hymn, was sung. The second lesson was from 1 Corinthians, chapter 15, read by Archdeacon Madden. It had been intended to finish the service by the graveside, but the rain came on and it was ended in church. The coffin was carried along the pathway lined by police. Bishop Royston said the words of committal and Bishop Chavasse the benediction. The body of John Charles Ryle, with Bible clasped in his hands, at last lay next to that of his wife.

On the gravestone were carved two texts. The first was a reminder of the conversion which started him on his pilgrimage with Christ. It was Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 8, 'For by grace are ye saved through faith'. The second testified that he had now finished that pilgrimage. It was 2 Timothy, chapter 4,

(concluded on page 191)

The Beatific Vision

'... and they shall see His face' (Revelation 22 : 4).

ROBERT RODGERS

The Word of God records for us the translation of the Apostle Paul to the third heaven (whether in or out of the body he could not tell) where he heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Says Charles Hodge: 'The communications made to the apostle he was not allowed to make known to others. The veil which conceals the mysteries and glories of heaven God has not permitted to be raised. It is enough that we know that in that world the saints shall be made perfectly holy and perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of God forever.'

Now if the *language* of heaven produces such a profound effect upon those thus privileged to hear it, what can we say of the *sights* that are to be beheld in the abode of God? In the twenty-first chapter of the Revelation John sees the holy city, the New Jerusalem, and under the inspiration of the gracious Spirit the apostle exhausts his vocabulary as he describes the vision. Here is a city having the glory of God and light like unto a stone most precious. It is a city of pure gold, as it were transparent glass, garnished with all manner of precious stones and its twelve gates are made of pearl. Proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb John sees a river of water of life clear as crystal. On this side of the river and on that there is the tree of life and its leaves are for the healing of the nations. Surely the sight of these wonders must be stupendous indeed and calculated to excite in every renewed heart desires for the consummate glory of God.

As if that were not enough, the Bible has something to say about the *inhabitants* of heaven. The throne of God and of the Lamb is surrounded by a company of beings and people so vast in number as to defy calculation. There are the *Seraphim*, those highest heavenly intelligences who hide their faces in the presence of God and cry, 'Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory'. There, too, are the *Cherubim* who delight to do the will of God continually and find unceasing joy in obeying God's command. With them are the *elect angels* who kept their first estate, confirmed in holiness and swelling the heavenly anthem as God in Christ is glorified.

Those heavenly beings are happily joined by an innumerable

company of just men made perfect, redeemed unto God out of every nation, kindred, people and tongue. Here we have no chosen few, but a multitude that no man can number, for in all things Christ will have pre-eminence.

Moses, Joshua and all the grand patriarchs are there, for Jesus has promised that many shall come from the East and from the West and shall sit down in the Kingdom with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

With them in holy society are the prophets, those mighty men of God who endured incredible hardships in order to set forth the mind and will of God. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, together with their associates who spent themselves in the cause of God and truth, men who pointed with unerring finger to the coming Messiah, are among that august company. Psalmists, poets, statesmen and seers, each witnessing to his own generation and fulfilling his own God-given task, form part of that great assembly.

In company with them are the New Testament followers of the Lamb. The early disciples are there with the apostles, those who saw the Lord of life and power and glory in the days of His flesh, who heard the gracious words that fell from His lips, who witnessed the wonderful miracles He performed and who were themselves transformed by divine power.

Confessors and martyrs who counted it all joy to be esteemed worthy to suffer for the sake of Jesus walk the streets of heaven with the great Church Fathers who, in the face of growing heresy, laboured to preserve the pure gospel for succeeding generations. There is Athanasius, who was willing to stand alone against the world as the champion of Christ's deity. There, too, is Augustine, who so effectively opposed the heretical notions of Pelagius that he has been known to all subsequent history as the Doctor of Grace. With them is John Chrysostom, so eloquent in his preaching of the evangel that he was dubbed 'the golden-mouthed'.

Choice souls who held aloft the torch of truth in the appalling gloom of pre-Reformation days are now numbered with the Reformers themselves. The Waldensians, who sealed their testimony with their blood in the valleys of Piedmont; John Wycliffe and John Hus and others unknown and unsung; these are they who consort with kindred spirits around the throne of God in heaven. Calvin, Luther and Zwingli together with their fellow-reformers now experience in a vastly superior manner than ever they did on earth the truth of the Reformation watchword, 'After darkness, light'; for now they live in the kingdom of light.

The 17th century Puritans, to whom such an evangelical debt is owed, and their 18th century successors such as Edwards, Whitefield and Toplady, shake hands in heaven with the spiritual giants of last century like C. H. Spurgeon. They share the abode of God with legions of faithful though unknown servants of the Lamb whose names are known only to Him.

Such people as these are the inhabitants of heaven. They bask in the sunshine of God's smile for evermore. They sing in perfect harmony the song of Moses and of the Lamb. And the sights that meet their wondering gaze are unsurpassed for beauty and unequalled in their glory by anything we might possibly imagine. And yet! The sight of these transcendent beauties, these unspeakable glories, this multitudinous throng pulsating with praise to God, pales into insignificance beside that which eclipses them all—the Beatific Vision—‘for they shall see His face’.

This, after all, has been the hope of Old and New Testament saints alike. Consider the words of Job: ‘For I know that my redeemer liveth and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh *shall I see God*: Whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold and not another’ (Job 19 : 25-27). Moses cried, ‘Shew me now Thy glory’, and the writer to the Hebrews records that Moses endured as seeing Him who is invisible. And when David cried to the Lord for deliverance from his enemies he gladly looked forward to the time when he would see God. ‘As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake with Thy likeness’ (Psalm 17 : 15). This verse may well have been in the mind of the apostle John when he penned his first epistle. ‘Beloved, now are we the sons of God and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when *it* shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is’ (1 John 3 : 2). Dr. R. S. Candlish rightly says: ‘. . . what is most important is the phrase, *when he shall appear*. It is that which leads readers of our translation to bring in our Lord Jesus Christ as if He must be the party referred to; especially as they are apt to connect the phrase with what is said before of ‘His coming’ (2 : 28). But there is no pronoun at all here in the original; and what is supplied should be ‘it’ rather than ‘he’. The connection is not with the remoter passage, in a previous section, now ended, but with what goes before in the

very same verse: 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when that does appear, we shall be like Him', like God whose sons we are; 'for we shall see Him as He is'.

Lest imagination should have free rein and speculation go unchecked we must constantly bear in mind that Scripture does stress the invisibility of God. Says John in the prologue to his gospel record, 'No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him'. Jesus is declared by Paul to be 'the image of the invisible God', whilst the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews says that Moses endured as seeing Him Who is invisible. Paul returns to this theme twice over in writing to Timothy and it is fitting that in both instances the apostle's language is couched in terms of doxology. First of all the contemplation of the first coming of Christ gives rise in Paul's experience to a spontaneous outburst of praise to 'the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God'. Then he thinks in terms of the second coming and again words can scarcely express his thoughts; ' . . . Who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in light which no man can approach unto; Whom no man hath seen nor can see; to Whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen'. Yet, after all, it does seem that the Word of God holds out the promise to God's people that they shall see His face, that in some majestic and, as yet, mysterious way, the saints will enjoy a future vision of God.

It is recorded of some in the Old Testament that they saw God. Jehovah appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre and announced that Sarah would have a son. A man wrestled with Jacob until the breaking of the day and the patriarch called the place Peniel—the face of God—for, said he, 'I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved'. Such theophanies as these, together with the appearances of the Angel of the Lord—the second Trinitarian Person in His pre-incarnate state—were a divinely given foretaste of the blessing that would belong to men when God incarnate would tabernacle among them. Only Jesus could say, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father'. And certain it is that we shall see the face of Christ, the Lord of life and power and glory. The face of the incarnate Christ was not at all prepossessing. The words of Isaiah were true indeed, for there was no beauty that men should desire Him. On earth He knew what it was to be tired and hungry and to have no permanent home. He learned

obedience by the things that He suffered and He was tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin. His vicarious sufferings weighed upon Him to such an extent that He sweated as it were great drops of blood. These experiences could not but leave their mark upon Him and before He entered His passion He was prematurely aged. When at last He was scourged and hanged upon the tree His visage was marred more than any man's and His form more than the sons of men. He undoubtedly bears the marks of His suffering in the glory. His resurrection body must bear the imprint of nail and spear. There are scars to show that a crown of thorns had been plaited with unholy enthusiasm and pressed into His lovely brow. When John in the Patmos vision saw the Lord, he saw a Lamb as it had been slain. Jesus has died, been buried, has risen again from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on high and 'in heaven He wears His priesthood still'. Yet as the redeemed gaze upon His glorious countenance and discern the traces of sufferings and burdens borne 'there is nothing to excite a tear nor to beget a sigh'. Christ is all glorious and the sight of the Lamb in all His glory is the fulness of which the highly favoured trio was permitted to catch but a glimpse upon the Mount of Transfiguration when the Master's face shone as the sun.

Yet we believe John when he tells us that God's servants see His face in that city that has no need of a sun. This is surely to be the crowning glory, the climax of the history of redemption and the chief blessing of those who dwell in the abode of God.

1. *The text breathes perfection.* Moses cried, 'Shew me now Thy glory' and God replied, 'There shall no man see Me and live'. 'God,' says the Bible, 'dwells in light unapproachable', He is the One Whom no man hath seen nor can see. To behold God's face, therefore, implies that imperfection has been removed, spiritual maturity has been achieved in full measure and that wholeness, completeness and perfection have been granted. That barrier of light is impassable only to those still in a state of imperfection.

'Great Father of Glory, pure Father of light,
Thine angels adore Thee all veiling their sight;
All laud we would render, O help us to see
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee.'

Man in his present condition could not bear the weight nor intensity of such a vision of God. 'The spirits that surround the throne may bear the burning bliss, but that is surely theirs

alone since they have never, never known a fallen world like this.' But the day will come when God will cast away our imperfection and we will see His face.

What sort of perfection will we have in heaven?

It will be a moral perfection. 'And there shall in no wise enter into it (the City) anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.' Could an unredeemed man possibly enter the eternal city, its very perfection would make it a veritable hell to him. Here men love darkness rather than light, but there is no night there for the saints dwell in perpetual light. Here we lock our doors and bar our windows because of the dishonesty of men, but in the City of God the gates are never shut. Here we live in an atmosphere which is morally polluted, but in heaven we shall breathe the very atmosphere of God.

It will be a mental perfection. 'Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.' Here upon earth we suffer the limitations of finite men and though we spend our years in the accumulation of knowledge we find that our wisdom is as a drop in the ocean. Man cannot by searching find out God. But in heaven, when we see God, our intellects will be heightened, our memories sharpened and our capacities for comprehending God greatly extended. Because of the Beatific Vision we shall know what now we cannot comprehend.

It will be a physical perfection. At present, our aches and pains, our melancholy and our moods, all conspire to divert our spiritual gaze from God. Our trials and tribulations are bent upon depriving us of our vision of God. But in heaven, the Beatific Vision will banish sorrow and sighing, there will be no more pain and death will be utterly unknown. Our eternal life will be derived from the One upon Whom we set our steadfast gaze.

It cannot be supposed that corruption can gaze upon the incorruptible God or that mortality can see the Ancient of Days. But Paul says that this corruptible must put on incorruption and that this mortal must put on immortality. Then we shall see God's face.

2. *The text bespeaks manifestation.*

Jesus pronounced those blessed who, though not having seen, yet loved Him. At present we walk by faith and not by sight. Like Abraham, we are called to step out in faith not

knowing in advance the path along which the Lord will lead. Like the Patriarch, we look for a City which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. Now abideth faith, hope and love. But the day will come when faith will give place to sight, all our hopes will be realised and love will find its perfect fulfilment in its vision of God.

3. *The text indicates perpetual benediction.*

Because of a people's sin they cannot see God. ' . . . your sins have hid His face from you . . . ' Asaph speaks with regard to the miseries of the Old Testament Church and cries, 'Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause Thy face to shine and we shall be saved'. The very beautiful Aaronic blessing incorporates this idea of the face of God: 'The Lord bless thee and keep thee: The Lord make His face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace'. In other words it is the uniform testimony of Scripture that when God's face is turned away from His people there is spiritual barrenness and loss of favour. On the other hand, when God smiles upon His people there is spiritual advance and multiplied blessing. What then of the Beatific Vision? To bask in the sunshine of God's smile forever, to dwell in an unclouded environment and to behold His face continually must surely indicate perpetual blessing indeed.

4. *The text includes glorious transformation.*

It will be a transformation of the whole man. From imperfection to perfection, from incompleteness to wholeness, from immaturity to men of complete stature, and from partial perception to unclouded vision of God. The saints are changed from glory to glory by their vision of God, for they shall be like Him when they shall see Him as He is.

Who would willingly deny such blessing to those loved ones who are called to go home by the way of death? Who would foolishly seek to hold on to those who are called upon by God to participate in such bliss? When the friends of Toplady surrounded his death-bed and voiced the opinion that perhaps God would raise him up and restore him to his ministry, Toplady replied, 'I must die, for no man can live after seeing the glories that God has revealed to my soul'. If death be but the vestibule to the Beatific Vision, let us welcome the advancing years and rejoice in the hoary head. Let us learn to say with Wesley, 'So this is death! Why, death is sweet!' For when by His grace I shall look on His face, that will be glory, be glory for me.

How different it is for the unbeliever! The Word of God tells us that the prime pre-requisite to the Beatific Vision is purity of heart. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' It describes the inhabitants of the eternal City as those who behold God's face because they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. They are God's servants and they are His people. But the unbeliever is none of these! For him there is only certain destruction, for he has his part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone which is the second death. The attitude he sustains to the Judge of all the earth is graphically described by John when, speaking of the Occupant of the Great White Throne, he adds these significant words, '... from Whose face the earth and heaven fled away'. The unsaved cannot look upon God, but the righteous are like the burning bush in that they glow with the glory of God without being consumed with the fire. They see God's face and cry, 'Transported with the view, I'm lost in wonder, love and praise'. Dr. W. G. T. Shedd says, 'It is not possible . . . to imagine or describe this glorious and final theophany. We cannot draw a picture of that resplendent Form before which the heavenly hosts bow in reverence and love. And all such attempts to go beyond what is written are presumptuous'. Heaven is 'a land of pure delight where saints immortal reign, where infinite day excludes the night and pleasures banish pain'. But best of all, it is that place where God Himself shall wipe away all tears from His people's eyes so that, with undimmed vision, 'they shall see His face'.

Book Reviews

A COMMENTARY ON THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

George Burrowes. The Banner of Truth Trust. Pp 527. £1.50.

Burrowes on the Song of Solomon was first published in Philadelphia in 1853. Although highly spoken of in this country by such reliable judges as C. H. Spurgeon and Dr. A. Moody Stuart, the first British edition did not appear until 1958, when it was reprinted by the Banner. Whilst the 1958 reprint was welcomed and appreciated by many, it omitted the long introduction contained in the American edition. This new reprint is all the more welcome as it includes the introduction, rendering the work complete.

The Summary and Analysis are helpful and give the author's idea of the meaning of the Song.

In the exposition his aim has been 'to unfold the truth, in the way supposed the most desirable to a soul animated with fervent love for the Lord Jesus, and craving the hidden manna which the Holy Spirit has lodged in this precious portion of the Scriptures'. Here Burrowes is excellent. His work is clear, thorough, careful, learned and scholarly.

The complaint by some Christians that commentaries are dry and uninspiring cannot, with any degree of accuracy, be levelled at this work. The author's depth of spiritual perception and understanding, together with a warm-hearted devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, make it a book of great practical value. We wish it a wide circulation. K. S. BAIRD.

JOHN CALVIN'S SERMONS ON EPHESIANS. Banner of Truth Trust. Pp 705. £2.50.

We have yet to be disappointed in a Banner publication, but in our estimation this is one of the most significant the Trust has ever done. Whether we consider the content, print, binding or price, this is an incomparable production.

The book includes an extremely interesting introduction by the publishers and a Letter to the Readers from 'those who caused these sermons to be brought to light'. Then follows Calvin's own introduction and the text of his forty-eight sermons on this epistle. As C. H. Spurgeon was careful to point out, the sermons are distinct from Calvin's exposition of Ephesians, and as they were preached on successive Sundays

during 1558/9 they provide a fine example of the Reformer's regular pulpit-work.

Biographers have presented Calvin in a variety of roles, but it was undoubtedly as a preacher that he excelled. Says Stickelberger, 'He was a relentless preacher of the Word. In addition to the Sunday worship service, every second week he held the daily weekday services. More than two thousand of these sermons are preserved. Their clear, fresh presentation is still gripping. Verse by verse, as his custom was, he went through a Prophet, a Psalm, a Gospel or an Epistle. There was not a word in disagreement with Scripture, no digressing inferences, no evasion of difficulties. He renounced everything which might bring him personal glory and placed his genius, his scholarship, his rhetoric, wholly at the service of the Gospel. This inflexibility with himself was the great fact in his proclamation. And with the fiery power of the expression of his conviction he succeeded in arousing the masses for God as they crowded around his pulpit'.

One always approaches Calvin's works with the greatest confidence. His writings are characterised by spiritual perception, sober judgment and loyalty to the analogy of scripture. Those who have learned to turn to Calvin as one to be trusted will be delighted to possess this hitherto extremely rare volume. And those who feel drawn to the reformer but are prone to fret about the extremes of hyper-calvinism, will do well to read this book. There is something entirely refreshing about reading Calvin himself, for there is a candour and balance about his writings that are not always reflected in the productions of some who profess to be his disciples. Indeed, the balance of Calvin's sermons will effectively disprove the charges of those who caricature him as the author of an extreme doctrinal position which reads the Bible with one eye shut. As an example of his concern to teach the whole counsel of God, one might appeal to a passage from a sermon where he is dealing with the doctrine of Election. 'For he (Paul) shows here that although God's election is free and beats down and annihilates all the worthiness, works and virtues of men, nevertheless it does not provide us with licence to do evil and to lead a disordered life, or to run amok, but rather it serves to withdraw us from the evil in which we were plunged' (p. 33).

By all means procure this book, for, as Spurgeon says, 'The sermons are priceless'.

ROBERT RODGERS.

THE FULL HARVEST. C. H. Spurgeon. Banner of Truth Trust. Pp 520. £2.10.

This is the second volume of Spurgeon's autobiography, and those who have been stimulated and blessed by 'The Early Years' will welcome this long-awaited sequel. It is not autobiography in the strict sense that it was produced by Spurgeon himself. It was in fact the product of the work of his widow and his secretary, who compiled the record of his life. But as a major slice of the book is in fact from Spurgeon's own writing or preaching we may take it as autobiography.

Here is a picture of one of the great men of Christian history, and yet with his greatness there is allied a true humility all in the setting of a warm humanity. His labours can only be described as prodigious. We see him preaching constantly, writing, editing, organising almshouses, orphanage, college and colportage associations. At the same time he is reading an enormous number of books (and storing their contents in his incredibly clear memory) and finding time not only to read theology but to keep abreast in other fields of knowledge such as natural science.

We think of Spurgeon as the great evangelist and preacher. He was certainly that, but he also had an interest in the whole man. So he was concerned with education, especially for those without the privilege of a good school behind them. He could move thousands with his passionate gospel preaching, but he could also give a popular lecture on gorillas!

Another notable feature was his catholicity—using that word in its strict connotation. Thus while he was a convinced Baptist and was quite prepared to engage in vigorous controversy on the subject, he was too big a man to be tied to any denominational narrowness. Thus he appointed as first principal of the College a paedo-baptist, and when he looked for a godly man to care for the orphans the head of the orphanage was once again astray in Spurgeon's view in his baptismal doctrine. But for Spurgeon this was not an inhibiting factor any more than it was in the close warm fellowship which he enjoyed with his Presbyterian friends in Scotland.

Much of his ministry was in the shadow of suffering. His wife was for a long time a semi-invalid. He himself suffered intensely and to an increasing extent from gout. So the superb preaching from the Tabernacle pulpit was not some theoretical dissertation, but a word which had been matured in the painful experience of his own life.

Yet when one has paid tribute to his industry, his powerful evangelism, his pastoral concern, his generosity—there is still one factor to note. Indeed, it is the supreme factor. It is Spurgeon's passionate devotion to Jesus Christ. He was Christ's man so utterly that his preaching is simply an out-pouring of a tribute of love and gratitude to his Saviour.

This book should be on your priority list.

WORKS OF RICHARD SIBBES. Banner of Truth Trust.
Pp 445. £1.95.

Richard Sibbes was one of the most famous preachers of seventeenth century Puritan England, exercising much of his ministry in Cambridge, where he was lecturer at Holy Trinity and later master of St. Catherine's. This volume is the first one of his collected works and comprises those issued during his lifetime. It includes two of his most celebrated writings, 'Soul's Conflict' and 'Bruised Reed'.

Perhaps the best commendation is to quote Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who wrote in his book, 'Preachers and Preaching', of his own personal debt to Sibbes. 'I shall never cease to be grateful to Richard Sibbes, who was balm to my soul at a period of my life when I was overworked and badly over-tired, and therefore subject in an unusual manner to the onslaughts of the devil. In that state and condition, to read theology does not help, indeed it may be wellnigh impossible; what you need is some gentle tender treatment for your soul. I found at that time that Richard Sibbes, who was known in London in the early seventeenth century as "the heavenly Doctor Sibbes", was an unfailing remedy. His books, "The Bruised Reed" and "The Soul's Conflict" quietened, soothed, comforted, encouraged and healed me.'

REFORMATION FOR THE FAMILY. Henry E. Walter Ltd. Pp 160. 75p.

The sub-title of this book must be kept well in view as in fact the book covers a much wider area than issues of family life—hence the sub-title 'And other articles from the quarterly magazine Reformation Today'.

As the titles of the magazine and of the book suggest, the background of the articles is a whole-hearted commitment to the doctrines of grace. But the concern is also plainly there that reformation is not simply a sixteenth or seventeenth century phenomenon, of interest to students of the history of those centuries, but is a matter of contemporary concern. The

aim of the contributors is to apply the great truths of the Reformation to the workaday world of the twentieth century in which God in His providence has placed us.

Hence while the problems of family life are in the forefront, the articles range very widely—ministerial training, missionary policy, revival, evolution, Christian unity. These are among the many issues covered. In a symposium there is always a certain unevenness in view of the variety of authorship, and this may be accentuated by the variety of themes. But at the same time readers will find a stimulating attempt by a wide group of men to look at our present world from the perspective of the Reformed Faith and to try to find biblical answers to some of the major issues of today.

H.M.C.

J. C. RYLE, Bishop of Liverpool (*concluded from page 178*)

verse 7, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith'.

The crowds had drifted away; the churchyard was silent once more. 'He sleeps in a quiet and beautiful churchyard a little way out of the smoke and turmoil of this great city,' said Bishop Chavasse a few days later; 'A heart of love lay deep down under a somewhat brusque demeanor.'

Hymn

Lord Jesus Christ, Thou dwell'st in highest heaven,
The embosomed Son of Love,
From everlasting days God's own begotten,
While angels all above
Chanted Thy praise, First Cause of all creation,
Earth's corner-stone not laid,
Nor Adam, first of men, nor any nation
By Thy strong hand yet made.

But such Thy love to men, when guilty sinners,
And such Thy heart's deep grace,
That they might of eternal life be winners,
Thou didst not hide Thy face
From all the shame that came through incarnation,
Nor from the pain and strife;
Thou cam'st to earth and wrought a full salvation,
Thy death the gate to life.

The agony and woe of Thy deep passion
The olive garden showed:
But such the wonders of Thy great compassion,
Thou still didst tread the road
Which led to Golgotha and dereliction—
All seemed but grief and loss—
But to Thy church what wealth of benediction
Resulted from Thy cross!

The third day came—'tis in the Scriptures numbered—
And Thou didst leave the bed
Wherein Thy sacred body safe had slumbered
When Thou wast with the dead.
The grave could then no longer hold Thee sleeping,
Loosed were the bonds and pain,
For Thou, the Lord of Life, hadst in Thy keeping
The keys of death's domain.

And now all power most rightfully is given
To Thee, my Sovereign Lord;
All other power in earth or hell or heaven
Falls down before Thy Word.
And every knee shall homage render to Thee,
And every tongue confess
That Thou, the Christ, dost reign in kingly glory,
And perfect righteousness.

S. M. Houghton.